

RESOURCES, SUPPORT, AND ADVOCACY FOR ALASKAN SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQIA+

By

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A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Education

In

School Counseling Secondary

University of Alaska Fairbanks

May 2017

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Abstract

This comprehensive literature review presents findings associated with the needs of students in grades 7-12 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and/or asexual (LGBTQIA+). In addition, the roles of school counselors, faculty, and staff in addressing these needs are discussed, and policy decisions and legislation supporting safe and inclusive environments are examined. A comprehensive guidebook is included which explains the legislative process that can be used to promote systems change in order to address these needs. The legislative proposal in this guidebook would mandate Alaskan school counselors receive proper training, resources, and guidance to appropriately support and advocate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Although there are legislative bills currently being introduced to the Alaska Legislature that support more inclusive anti-discrimination state-based laws, Alaska has yet to pass such a bill and its efforts remain inadequate concerning the institution of state law preventing bullying, discrimination, and violence in schools based on a student's gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual.

Keywords: asexual, bisexual, gay, intersex, legislation, lesbian, LGBTQIA+, questioning, school counseling, students, transgender

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to everyone who has inspired me and contributed to the journey of earning a graduate degree.

First, I am most grateful to my family for their unconditional love and help over the last four years. I would also like to thank my friends who have been supporting and patient towards me during this unique voyage of becoming a professional school counselor.

To Kerey, I send a thankful flow of energy from my entire heart for being there at all times and fathering our children. Whether it was listening to my presentations or encouraging me to keep going, you have been there and I thank you. Thank you for allowing my wings to spread and encouraging me to soar!

To my sweet sons, I thank you for being patient with your mother, and I hope that I inspire you to take a chance on life and challenge yourself to be better.

Thank you to my professors and others who have been there throughout the process to encourage my reach towards a higher standard.

A special thank you to Dr. Valerie Gifford for her time, editing, dedication, and professional guidance, while continually reminding me to keep my standards high. I am honored and lucky that Dr. Heather Dahl and Professor Hilary Wilson joined my project committee. Accomplishing something that at first seems impossible can be attained if someone believes in you!

An additional thank you to Jane Monahan for her support to students and staff throughout the counseling department. Also, I am lucky to have had the editing assistance of writing professionals such as Amy Hartley and Claire Gelvin-Smith.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the professional organizations that not only graciously assisted me in my research, but also continue helping an endless number of students and individuals. These organizations include: LAMBDA Legal, PFLAG, GLSEN and the Fairbanks Legislative Information Office.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+	5
Bullying at School	5
Underreporting	7
Homeless Youth Identifying as LGBTQIA+	7
Cultural Components	8
Microassault	9
Microinsult	9
Microinvalidation	10
Intersectionality	11
School Counselors and Students that Identify as LGBTQIA+	12
Prejudice and Personal Bias	13
Politics of Counseling in a School Setting	14
Complicating Factors of Incompetency	15
Theoretical Framework	17
Multi-Cultural Theory	17
Queer Theory	18

Social Justice and Legal Cases	19
Examples of Non-Supportive Elements for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+	22
House Bill (HB) 2: The Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016	23
Senate Bill (SB) 242: The Right of a Child’s Parents to Student Records	24
Conversion Therapy	25
Support and Advocacy for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+	26
Student Action	28
Community and Family Resources	28
Legal Guidance	29
The Basics of Legislation	30
Individuals Identifying as LGBTQIA+ in Alaska	31
Professional Development for Counselors	33
GLSEN	33
New York City (NYC) Respect for All (RFA) Training	36
Application	36
School Counselor Action	37
School-Based Resources and Training	38
Conclusion	39
References	41
Appendix A: Guidebook	50

Resources, Support, and Advocacy for Alaskan Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

Teenagers encounter unique opportunities and challenges growing up in a multicultural, pluralistic society, facing the ever-growing tensions between people. Certain students with diversity of sexual identity, sexual orientation and gender expression, have an even harder time than the general teenage population. The organization called PFLAG National, formerly known as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, clarify the letters and single terminology within the abbreviated term, LGBTQIA+. This acronym represents the group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and/or asexual (PFLAG, 2017b). One advocacy group called Alaskans Together for Equality, or ATE, stresses that Alaska is one of 29 states that lacks legal protection for people who identify as LGBTQIA+, specifically in areas of education, housing, employment, public accommodation and medical care (ATE, 2017c). This lack of protection is notable in Alaska's K-12 school system. Research highlights a range of mental health and other school-related problems experienced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing they are the most stigmatized minority in most school systems (Hall, McDougald, & Kresica, 2013).

The state of Alaska is deficient concerning state-based laws preventing violence and bullying in schools based on a student's gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual identity (ATE, 2017c). However, some school districts have attempted to provide basic protection for their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Alaska Legal Resource Center (2008) summarized the Alaska Statute AS 14.33.200 which directed the state's school districts to each adopt their own customized policy that addresses bullying, harassment and intimidation. The districts were then guided to relay the policy to school employees, students, parents or guardians and/or school volunteers. The districts were further asked to report to the appropriate committees the yearly

totals of recorded incidents that happened on school property, specifically events involving intimidation, bullying or harassment that resulted in suspension of the student. For example, the local Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD) lays out specified guidance, expectations and discipline for students, parents/guardians and school staff in their handbook titled, *Student Rights, Responsibilities & Behavioral Consequences Handbook*. In the section labeled *Harassment*, there is a clear definition of harassment which includes specific language about targeting populations based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This effort highlights this district's attempt to protect their students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (FNSBSD, 2012).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a respected organization and division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), which has taken steps to highlight LGBTQIA+ concerns within school systems. This organization, also endorsed by the American Psychological Association, or APA, calls upon school counselors to be strong advocates for students identifying as LGBTQIA+ (APA, 2016). The ASCA clearly states that school counselors will promote respect, equal opportunity and affirmation for every student, regardless of gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation (ASCA, 2017a). Moreover, laws written into the United States (U.S.) Constitution, such as the Establishment Clause, the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States, Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Opportunity Act, serve to legally safeguard all individuals, including people who identify as LGBTQIA+ (American Psychological Association [APA], 2016; Equal Opportunity Division, 2000).

Nearly two-thirds of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported sexual-orientation related discrimination happening during school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014). Of this population, the students with the highest levels of victimization displayed more severe

depression, reduced self-confidence and a lower grade point average (Kosciw et al., 2014). In other research, students who identify as LGBTQIA+ were surveyed and they expressed a lack of confidence in the school system (Hall et al., 2013).

School counselors expose the need for continued professional development and training, reporting decreased competency when working with individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Bidell, 2012). The ASCA (2017a) emphasized that school counselors should be contributing to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+. As a result of these key findings evidenced in literature, the research questions guiding this project are:

- What are the needs of students identifying LGBTQIA+ within the 7-12th grade school system?
- What role do the school counselors, and other school personnel, play in addressing these needs?
- What policy decisions and legislation could support safe and inclusive learning environments for students identifying as LGBTQIA+, and their families, within schools?

This review will focus on peer-reviewed literature that explores the many challenges students who identify as LGBTQIA+ face, evaluating relevant theory and law, and examining reasons that school counselors are not utilizing resources and trainings that could potentially help students who identify as LGBTQIA+. This project also explores credible organizations, resources, and trainings that further advocate and help safeguard students who identify as LGBTQIA+. A comprehensive guidebook is attached, outlining the basic process of promoting an idea for legislation that would mandate Alaskan school counselors to receive proper training, resources, and guidance to appropriately support and advocate for students who identify as

LGBTQIA+. The guidebook will also present brief statistics, a relevant glossary, as well as a sample letter to each stakeholder involved, followed by a list of comprehensive and credible resources for staff, family, and students.

Literature Review

Research has illuminated evidence concerning the hardships faced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, analyzing the role and self-confidence of the school counselor while also examining influences of professional ethics, culture, social justice and law. According to research conducted by Kosciw et al. (2014), students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported that a certain percentage of school staff were taking part in the verbal harassment, adding to their distress. The ASCA (2017c) has responded to this issue by more specifically defining the school counselor's role. They highlighted the importance that school counselors affirm and respect the diverse sexual orientation of the students, expressing an expectation that school counselors promote overall education and awareness on issues that impact people who identify as LGBTQIA+ to further ensure safety of all students.

Although there is overwhelming agreement from major health, medical and mental health professionals that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are healthy and normal, human expressions, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to struggle on many levels (APA, 2016). Erevelles (2011) underscored that if we do not begin looking at how to implement more education and support for people who identify as LGBTQIA+, the hurtful belief that this population is not equal to others will continue to be the norm. To promote a safer school climate, school counselors should be fully aware of the negative consequences that impact many LGBTQIA+ students, striving to further enhance the resiliency of our youth (McCabe & Robinson, 2008).

Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

Although adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school counselors and/or friends, this action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013). McCabe, Robinson, Dragowski and Elizalde-Utnick (2013) stressed the reality that victimization and harassment are linked to an assortment of negative mental health and educational outcomes. The survey titled the *National School Climate Survey*, has been routinely administered by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) since 1999. GLSEN is a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating for affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research concerning educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that the current educational environments are often unsafe for this population (GLSEN, 2017c). The National School Climate Survey revealed an increasing number of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reporting that they feel school is not a safe place.

Bullying at school. Even with increasing attention towards an escalating form of abuse, LGBTQIA+-targeted bullying continues to be a major issue high schools (APA, 2016). A nationwide survey taken by 7800 students who identified as LGBTQIA+ revealed that at least half did not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009). An even greater number, 74.1%, responded that they had been harassed verbally, 36.2% said they were harassed physically and approximately half of those that responded had experienced cyberbullying.

Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, and Koenig (2008) emphasized that social environment plays an essential role in protecting youth from negative behavioral and psychological outcomes. Yet, many students who identify as LGBTQIA+ view their school in a negative way, based upon a

lack of safety. These students reported that rather than confront victimization, they preferred to skip their classes, further damaging their academic performance and grades (McCabe et al., 2013). In secondary schools, when compared to their gender-conforming and heterosexual peers, harassed students who identified as LGBTQIA+ had a lower grade point average and communicated decreased post-secondary education plans (Kosciw et al., 2014). When educators fail to follow through with appropriate action to address a student's bullying, it is viewed as even worse than not intervening because it decreases the student's trust in school personnel. Furthermore, this lack of response discourages other student reports of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Research presented by Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) states that modern tools, such as enhanced technology, allow for an increased capacity to learn but this technology also promote vulnerability for youth. In contrast, there is a decreased ability to keep personal information private and this same technology, in the form of social media, can be used as a weapon in high school. Examples of this include texting, Snapchat, Facebook and/or Twitter (GLSEN, 2011). In general, it seems that many teenagers are not sure about what is appropriate, concerning both friendships and romantic relationships, and they have growing access to even more threatening routes of harassment, further clarifying a need for guidance (Schneider et al., 2012).

The damage that stems from school-based bullying touches upon many areas of life for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Bidell (2012) highlighted that psychosocial and emotional problems increase with the escalation of harassment and bullying. There is often internalized insecurity and/or self-hate experienced by youth who identify as LGBTQIA+, shaped by their sexual identity ("Did Your," 2010). According to research conducted by Espelage et al. (2008),

youth who identified as LGBTQIA+ were more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression and to utilize alcohol and/or marijuana as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, the authors found, when compared to students who identify as heterosexual, some students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported decreased support from their parents and/or guardians.

School-based victimization may last for a lifetime, since students who identify as LGBTQIA+ report a decreased desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014). Research presented by King et al. (2008) reveals that people who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a higher risk for substance abuse, mental health disorders and suicidal behavior, when compared to heterosexual individuals. Moreover, many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are not getting equal access to health care, including mental health care (King et al., 2008).

Underreporting. More than half of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ that were surveyed expressed that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur (Kosciw, 2014). These respondents had several reasons why students chose not to report bullying and/or harassment to their school staff. According to research directed by Kosciw et al., some of the reasons for not reporting included: doubting effective intervention would occur, concern about the reaction of school staff, fear that the situation may become worse if reported, disoriented perception of the level of harassment, the student choosing to confront the situation alone, as well as additional barriers including lack of proof and other specified concerns.

Homeless youth identifying as LGBTQIA+. The rejection and emotion involved with youth revealing their identity to their family can result in extreme results and running away from home may be a common coping mechanism for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Durso & Gates, 2012). Research presented by Durso and Gates (2012) found that homeless agencies,

outreach centers, drop-in centers and housing programs served a large portion of clients who identified as LGBTQIA+. Data suggests that approximately 30-45% of the total clientele identified as LGBTQIA+. Youth who encounter homelessness and identify as LGBTQIA+ experience intense needs, presenting a high rate of substance use, mental health problems, violent victimization, suicidal actions and a variety of HIV-risk behaviors (Keuroghlian, Shtasel & Bassuk, 2014). Durso and Gates found that the most commonly reported reason that youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ run away from their families and become homeless stems from feelings of rejection based on the youth's gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This research noted that the second most common reason this youth runs away is that their family physically forces them out of their house, based off a negative response. Youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ may be driven out of their homes during early adolescence emphasizing the increased need for support, advocacy, and protection during these years.

Cultural Components

Sue and Sue (2013) believe that everyone is infused with culture, integrated by similar belief systems and values of their cultural matrix. Biases and prejudices grow institutionalized, engrained into the beliefs, values, and norms of society (Sue, 2010). Through the process of cultural conditioning and socialization, these societal norms continue to be passed down through each generation.

Sue (2010) presented a definition of microaggression, stressing that this social behavior is brief and subtle, manifesting in different forms including visual, verbal, nonverbal and/or behavioral. Microaggressive stressors may be gender-related, race-related, sexual-orientation-related or other impressionable factors can have an effect. Sue also discovered that when these stressors occur, there are four areas that may impact the victim: cognitive, biological, behavioral

and/or emotional. Perpetrators deliver microaggressions on an unconscious level and although they may appear innocent, they can potentially be harmful, even detrimental, to the victim's mental and/or physical health. Microaggressions can be communicated through environment, creating unsafe feelings, isolation and alienation (Sue, 2010).

In a school setting, microaggressions will inevitably manifest between students as well as between school staff and students, particularly within relationships considered having a therapeutic basis (Sue & Sue, 2013). There is a breakdown of categories concerning microaggressions, including: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. However, regardless of the category of microaggression, each action is damaging to the standard of living and overall well-being of societies' marginalized groups (Sue, 2010). Sue concluded that the secondary effect is further devastating, influencing all levels of life, as microaggressions decrease equal access to employment, education and health care for minority groups.

Microassault. Sue and Sue (2013) emphasized that microassault is a type of attack that can occur on several levels including environmental, verbal and/or nonverbal. These researchers note that this type of assault is connected to sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism as well as religious discrimination. Microassault is committed by those with conscious biases and there tends to be certain conditions under this form of microaggression. Sue and Sue (2013) state that the conditions of microassault include losing control of one's emotions/feelings, ensuring that it will be anonymous, and happening when in the presence of other people who have the same biased action or belief. Microassaults are more direct and conscious, therefore easier to confront, compared to other forms of microaggressions that are outside the awareness of the perpetrator.

Microinsult. Microinsults are verbal comments or unintentional behaviors that communicate insensitivity and often demean the victim's sexual orientation, gender identity,

racial heritage/identity, ability, and/or religion (Sue & Sue, 2013). Unlike microaggression, microinsults are considered more unconsciously driven, yet they often hold a message of insult for the victim. Sue and Sue highlight that a microinsult may at first appear like a compliment, yet lead the victim feeling decreased self-worth and dignity after the transaction.

Microinvalidation. Similar to microinsults, microinvalidations are also usually outside the awareness of the perpetrator and often unintentional, yet are perceived as possibly the most damaging of the three groups (Sue, 2010). Microinvalidations display behaviors or verbal commentary that may contribute to feelings of exclusion for the victim (Sue & Sue, 2013). Sue (2010) added that this type of microaggression communicates environmental messages that may nullify the psychological assertions of minority groups. Sue notes that microinvalidations are hurtful because of the insidious and direct way they serve to deny the reality of the victim's ability, gender, racial or sexual orientation.

Research conducted by Sue (2010) noted that sexual-orientation microaggressions are a common part of daily speech and environment, accumulating and continual starting at birth. While microaggressions in general are a regular occurrence, it is difficult to quantify and identify these acts due to their subtle and unpredictable behavior. Sue indicated specific microaggressions aimed at individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, including: oversexualization, heterosexist language/terminology, homophobia, assuming abnormality, judged as sinful, denial of prejudice and endorsing exclusive heteronormative behavior and culture. However, one of the most influential microaggressions aimed at LGBTQIA+ youth is the assumption that all individuals are heterosexual, a belief that can challenge self-identity and overall development (Sue, 2010). Sue and Sue (2013) affirm that microaggressions are a

communication of subtle oppression for the person engaging in the behavior, highlighting the emotional influence for both parties involved.

Intersectionality

Sue and Sue (2013) indicated that although the sexual activity may be heterosexual or homosexual, it does not necessarily indicate that the person is to be categorized. Researchers theorize that identity exploration involves an ongoing struggle between external assumptions and perceptions that others conclude concerning a person's sexual orientation. Gender identity/expression and sexual orientation display essential differences, yet it is common to interlink the differing groups represented within the acronym LGBTQIA+ collectively, especially for research purposes (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson, 2014). Even so, it is vital to remember that each group presents important differences. PFLAG (2017b) explains that the vocabulary embracing sexual orientation and gender continues to evolve and there is a lack of agreement concerning universal terminology. However, PFLAG also points out the importance of using terminology properly, to continue clarifying any misconceptions about people who identify as LGBTQIA+. They emphasize that the plus at the end of the acronym LGBTQIA+ indicates inclusion for all the identities within the group.

Intersectionality theories are complex, yet they essentially display awareness concerning the interconnected, multiple identities that are defined by sociocultural privilege and power, as definitions of race/ethnicity are often viewed as culturally-dependent (Parent, DeBlaere & Moradi, 2013). Research on this theory declares that forms of oppression may interrelate, and not all aspects of identity may be exclusive. For example, gender intersects with other identities of a social nature, such as status, age, ability, race, ethnicity, social class and even sexual orientation, potentially creating a unique whole, different from separate identities.

It is critical to recognize the limitations of intersectionality, and the assumptions that are made in the research concerning intersecting, cultural dynamics. Research shows that even coding people who identify as LGBTQIA+ into one group creates implications for the process of analyzing and understanding the LGBTQIA+ identities, and it often breaks the groups into two: heterosexual and non-heterosexual or sexual minority vs. non-minority (Parent et al., 2013). Even so, the experiences of people who identify as LGBTQIA+ will potentially differ and it is important to keep this in mind (Espelage et al, 2008).

The recommendation for approaching the uniqueness of intersecting identities is to take a more quantitative approach and focus on the research and hypotheses that center on the specific population, taking into consideration the within group diversity elements (Parent et al., 2013). Group membership may result in similar, shared attributes for its members, while some individuals may be part of more than one cultural group (Sue & Sue, 2013). However, examination can remain balanced and complementary by focusing more on the intersecting oppressions rather than the intersecting identities (Parent et al., 2013). Research by Keuroghlian et al. (2014) noted the importance of continuing to acknowledge that the subpopulations within the LGBTQIA+ acronym present challenges that are unique and dependent upon factors of age, experiences, sex, geographic region, ethnicity, sexual behavior, gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

School Counselors and Students that Identify as LGBTQIA+

Recently, awareness about sexual orientation diversity has increased across a variety of societal spheres and this includes schools (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Pope (2003) highlighted the reality in the U.S. that sexuality and sex are viewed as taboo topics and even in modern times it remains unclear how one determines sexual orientation. This type of vagueness

fuels the potential for discrimination and misunderstanding. This potential for victimization, mixed with the reality that adolescence is a fragile and often complicated time for most individuals, stresses the need for supportive educators to contribute to an overall safer climate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (McCabe et al., 2013).

Schools are key to promoting increased access and knowledge of valuable resources. McCabe and Robinson (2008) pointed out that psychologists and counselors will need to become like teachers, potentially getting more specific training to deal with issues and difficulties that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ face, to make change that is positive. Research indicated that the majority of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ may not have an option to address their unique issues and needs with school counselors who are competent in this area (Hall et al., 2013). Furthermore, Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, and Giambrone (2014) pointed out the reality that many students felt there was not enough being done to address homophobic bullying and teach students about the issues that people who identify as LGBTQIA+ encounter.

Prejudice and personal bias. There are many forms and levels of prejudice and bias, and some are specifically aimed towards people who identify as LGBTQIA+. A school counselor's attitude towards students who identify as LGBTQIA+ will potentially influence the quality of assistance and support that the counselor provides (Morrison, Parriag & Morrison, 1999). One example of a common bias is known as homonegativity and is defined as a type of prejudice that is demonstrated towards people who identify as homosexual (Morrison et al., 1999).

Research conducted by Bidell (2012) illuminated the importance of professional school counselors exploring their own beliefs and values as related to the issues that sexual minority students confront. Although professional counselors work under ethics that guide them to

advocate for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, research highlighted the contrasting reality that the counselor's personal value system may not support homosexuality (Frank & Cannon, 2010). Professional development and continued education are vital for school counselors to align with the ASCA position concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+. ASCA's stance specifically reminds school counselors that regardless of a student's gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual orientation, counselors are to promote respect, affirmation and equal opportunity for every student (ASCA, 2017b).

Research directed by Morrison et al. (1999) found that for professional school counselors to achieve a better understanding of students who identify as LGBTQIA+, they should acquire training and information concerning social justice issues the LGBTQIA+ community faces. Research from Bidell (2012) indicates that level of training that a counselor achieves is linked to the level of sexual orientation and multicultural counseling competency. However, each counselor is trained for their unique environment and school-based counselors have different influences than a community counselor. The counseling competency scores are lower for school counselors than community counselors in the areas of sexual orientation and multicultural studies, and this data further emphasizes the importance of school counselors exploring the variables influencing their competency levels (Bidell, 2012).

Politics of counseling in a school setting. When counseling in a school-based setting, the counselor is most likely working within a political system that is regulated by federal, state and local laws and therefore manifests unique concerns (DePaul et al., 2009). Professional counselors working for a school system are paid wages that are directly linked to U.S. federal funds and therefore work under the federal laws laid out by the government (Lambda Legal, 2017b). Because of this, support for social justice advocacy is viewed as a potential risk for the

school counselor. Research presented by Bidell (2012) concluded that school counselors share the same concern as many teachers, stemming from a fear involving credibility, politics and judgment from co-workers. The federal law called Title IX attempts to protect all students from discrimination and/or sexual harassment based on gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual identity, whether the person is open about their identity or not (Lambda Legal, 2017b). Title IX bans discrimination at schools that are funded by the federal government, linking law, politics and the accountability of school staff.

Complicating factors of incompetency. Deeper, underlying dynamics are contributing to a negative school climate for LGBTQIA+ students, such as a general unsafe feeling that often leads to assault and/or harassment on school property (Kosciw et al., 2014). This further supports the dysfunctional cycle of discriminatory practices and policies being reinforced within the school setting (Hall et al., 2013). Current research reveals that although school counselors clearly know they should advocate and assist minority students, there are low levels of self-competency in this area. Bidell (2012) discovered that self-reported, counselor competency scores were significantly low for school counseling students concerning issues of multicultural and sexual orientation. Furthermore, looking at students who identify as LGBTQIA+ who reported their experience of harassment to staff, only 32.7% of them felt their school staff effectively responded (Kosciw et al., 2014). Although the content of educator preparation textbooks continues to incorporate more information on LGBTQIA+ issues, the texts are limited (Hansen, 2015).

One study centered on the behavioral intentions of counseling, graduate students in the education field and their outlook on youth advocacy for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, from a social justice standpoint (McCabe & Robinson, 2008). Results revealed that these

graduate students did not see themselves as change agents within a school. The researchers found that this was not based on an unwillingness to deal with social injustice, but a naiveté about the issues and challenges that students who identify LGBTQIA+ face. Furthermore, these graduate students expressed a lack of experience in serious social justice issues within a school environment. Frank and Cannon (2010) emphasized that many counselor educators have confronted a challenge in presenting adequate and competent education concerning sexual minorities, often due to conservative values as well as minimal exposure to this population.

Research conducted by Shi and Doud (2017) revealed evidence suggesting additional reasons why school counselors feel incompetent when working with students who identify as LGBTQIA+. These reasons, which are related to the counselor's self-reported competency level, included training experience, location of the counselors and the school counselors' own sexual orientation. There was a higher competency level connected to counselors who identified as non-heterosexual, resided in the Western U.S. and had completed graduate workshops and/or training (Shi & Doud, 2017).

Individuals working within a school know that youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are challenged on many levels, yet research exposes that school personnel are not fully supportive and often contribute to the negativity (Kosciw et al., 2014). Research conducted by Hall et al. (2013) concluded that LGBTQIA+ students require full support of their professional school counselors, because when educators and school staff are not adequately trained to be allies to students who identify as LGBTQIA+, they are not prepared to respond to the diverse, student needs.

There is an underscored need for graduate school counseling programs to be revamped to include realistic multicultural content and experiences that show understanding, appreciation,

strengths, history, needs, and resources of all minority groups (Sue & Sue, 2013). Research presented by Bidell (2012) stressed the demand to further analyze and shape graduate, counseling training programs, with counselor educators encouraged to explore areas of education in multicultural issues including more information about individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. Bidell highlighted the importance for graduate training to address the various challenges regarding gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation within a school environment.

Theoretical Framework

When examining the topic of professional school counselors advocating for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, certain theoretical underpinnings begin to emerge. The theoretical foundation of this project integrates multi-cultural theory and queer theory. Sue and Sue (2013) emphasize that *multicultural* is a term that embraces many elements, including sexual orientation, gender, disability, socioeconomic class as well as other marginalized groups.

Multi-cultural theory. Researchers have pointed out that LGBTQIA+ school counseling competence is rooted in a multicultural counseling framework (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013). Frank and Cannon (2010) pointed out the importance of identifying the population of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ as belonging to a cultural minority group. Over the last century, proponents of equality within the field of psychology have significantly influenced the importance of creating a pluralistic society, which embraces multiculturalism and inclusion (Hall et al., 2013). Although human beings all belong to the species, *Homo sapiens*, sharing certain universal traits, there is also the reality that each person is born into a unique matrix consisting of values, beliefs, social practices and rules that are rooted in culture (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Research presented by Asher (2007) emphasized there is limited attention given to sexual diversity within our multicultural society, particularly in school settings where it becomes vital to provide a diverse, educational environment to reach all groups of students. Furthermore, Asher noted that multicultural education has ignored sexuality, gender and class, with the main concentration on issues about race and culture, even though researchers reveal the increasing need to include other cultural groups. Sue and Sue (2013) noted the responsibility of counselors to advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ issues in the school curriculum. They stated that this responsibility serves to ensure that relevant social skills, self-management skills, as well as social service resources, are properly addressed, further nourishing a more nondiscriminatory learning environment.

Queer theory. Queer theory is built on a multicultural framework, further exploring diversity, yet, this theory is seen to represent a more comprehensive, multicultural approach towards helping individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Frank & Cannon, 2010). Queer theory is essential when confronting the need to provide more affirmative counseling services for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Frank and Cannon (2010) illuminated queer theory as an appropriate and more modern framework to properly confront the concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, while incorporating the concepts of multiculturalism and critical postmodernism. Queer theory involves reframing traditional definitions and concepts including psychopathology, gender, identity, and sexuality, while providing future counselors with more authentic, useful knowledge (Frank & Cannon, 2010). Furthermore, queer theory breaks down the ideas about what is traditionally normal and/or queer, while inviting schooling and curriculum to be used as

tools for exploring the alleged differences among individuals, instead of differences within groups.

Frank and Cannon (2010) highlighted research concerning the educational potential of using a queer theory framework to more properly guide counselors in training toward further examination of how both the client and the counselor are manipulated by forces of power, universal laws and codes. It is essential to have ongoing evaluation of the cultural atmosphere for positive change to occur (Frank & Cannon, 2010).

Social Justice and Legal Cases

Currently, issues concerning citizens who identify as LGBTQIA+ are a growing concern for many individuals. Lambda Legal (2017b) reported at least 65 open court cases in the U.S., narrowing in on cases that have the highest potential to strengthen and protect the rights of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. In the U.S., most states do not have laws specifically protecting LGTBQIA+ students, but there is continuous effort to introduce them. For the last several years, a group of U.S. Legislators have attempted to pass the Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015, also known as H.R. 998 and S. 439. This legislation would help protect sexual minorities, when targeted for perceived or actual sexual identity and/or sexual orientation, from discrimination and bullying in schools nationwide. The Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015 would further prevent students who identify as LGBTQIA+ from being excluded from education programs that are federally-assisted, clarifying the reality that harassment is a form of discrimination and will not be tolerated in the education field. The Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015 did not receive the amount of support to pass when it surfaced in the U.S. Senate in July of 2015, and it has not been reintroduced since (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2017).

Many U.S. leaders are proponents of changing or introducing laws that are potentially harmful for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ and Douglas (2017) wrote about the newly elected U.S. President, Donald Trump, who has flip-flopped on many of his positions, favoring conservative, Christian, republican values. Douglas notes that President Trump opposes gay marriage and has hired a team of staff with known negative attitude towards individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. Although peer-reviewed research presents increasing evidence revealing the high risk of substance abuse, mental health disorders and suicidal behavior for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, politics continue to influence the debate on controversial laws that potentially promote a decrease in the rights of this population (King et al., 2008).

On a legislative level, GLSEN has helped to guide policy makers toward equality for people who identify LGBTQIA+. Recently, GLSEN has partnered with many other organizations in support of various laws working to protect individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (GLSEN, 2017a). So far, it has been up to each state to provide specified protection for their LGBTQIA+ student communities. The states that have currently passed laws of a protective nature include: Washington (state), Oregon, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, New York, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, New Jersey, Washington D.C. and Massachusetts (GLSEN, 2017b).

One group that supports equality, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), highlighted that federal law currently does not address students who identify as LGBTQIA+ in a comprehensive manner (HRC, 2017). The Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2015, also known as H. R. 290 and /S. 311, was introduced to narrow in on K-12 public school's anti-bullying policies, amending the existing Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), with the goal of

emphasized protection for victims that are harassed due to gender identity, sexual orientation, race and/or religion (GLSEN, 2016a). Specifically, schools that receive funds from the federal government would be required to help prohibit harassment and bullying by adopting conduct codes. These codes would protect students against bullying based on religion, color, race, sex, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity (HRC, 2017). The comprehensive components of this act would require that each state regularly report to the U.S. Department of Education concerning harassment and bullying data, and every two years Congress would be updated on this data. The HRC notes that this bill died in Congress.

Some lawmakers have successfully worked towards promoting equality and developing effective law to protect increasingly vulnerable populations. In 2009, former president Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009. This act was connected to the National Defense Authorization Act, expanding federal hate crime law to include crime that was provoked by a victims' disability, gender identity, perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This expansion also deleted the requirement that the victim must be taking part in a federal activity, such as going to school or voting, while also increasing both funding as well as authority towards the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes (ATE, 2017b).

Whether it is state-based or federal, legislation presents varying levels of support for students who identify LGBTQIA+. There are positive role-models of supportive legislation, as seen in the state of California. Lambda Legal (2017a) emphasized that California is a positive example due to the increased focus and support for people who identify as LGBTQIA+. This state has incorporated several specified laws that advocate for California's residents.

For example, in 2011 California passed Senate Bill 48 (SB 48), also known as the FAIR Education Act of 2011. The FAIR Education Act of 2011 mandated that California Schools, K-12, give accurate and fair representations of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as individuals with disabilities. More specifically, the FAIR Education Act of 2011 proposed changing language in the state's current educational codes. The nature and intention of this law was to further protect minority groups from discrimination. It does not change the reality that local districts have choices on how they teach, and it does not interfere with the school's required academic standards. However, the FAIR Education Act of 2011 directed California's schools toward more accurately portraying racial and cultural diversity than before. This act added the term *sexual orientation* to the list of ethnic groups in textbooks, with a purpose of moving responsibility toward teachers to help change how minority groups are often inaccurately portrayed, even in academic material. However, the educational curriculum is not exclusively state mandated and the lessons that fulfill the requirements of the FAIR Education Act of 2011 are developed on a local level with collaboration from parents, teachers and school board members. Examples of Non-Supportive Elements for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

There are many challenging and controversial elements presented for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. People who identify as LGBTQIA+ continue to battle for equal rights, and there are several examples of how misunderstanding, potentially stemming from a lack of scientific research and education, greatly influence legal and social systems. Some states, such as North Carolina and Texas, have introduced bills that focus on the rights of students, particularly students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Pope (2003) noted that when students who identify as LGBTQIA+ discover they are different from some of their peers, affectionately and/or sexually, there may be a significant

psychological toll. Moreover, most youth exhibit a desperate need to belong, making youth a particularly challenging time for those who identify as LGBTQIA+.

House Bill (HB) 2: The Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016. In April of 2016, North Carolina's governor signed a bill that took away certain rights from the North Carolina municipal officials. Lee (2016) highlighted the details of this legislation, known as House Bill (HB) 2, the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016, also called the *Bathroom Act*. This act exposes an increasing trend for states to blatantly propose discriminatory laws with the misleading intention that these laws are supporting safety, religious freedom and/or equality. The Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016 states that in government buildings individuals, such as students or school employees, can only use the changing facility or bathroom that corresponds to the sex on their birth certificate (Lee, 2016). Supporters of the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016 claim that this bill intends to prevent sexual predators from entering the wrong bathroom (Lee, 2016).

In contrast, those against the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016 believe that this bill specifically violates areas of both the Fourteenth Amendment and the Title IX, because it is based on sexual orientation and/or sex. Yet, supporters of similar bills claim that there is concern about individuals whose birth certificate labels them male, presenting safety concerns if they choose to identify as female and use the women's bathroom (Lee, 2016).

When reviewing decisions of at least 35 states to pass ordinances concerning having bathroom choice and gender identity, there have been no reported cases sexual assault in these bathrooms (Lee, 2016). Lambda Legal (2017c) highlights the reality that youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are at a much higher risk for safety issues. The Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016 sends a hurtful message that individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ are

somehow not deserving of the same protections, choice and privacy as other U.S. citizens are allowed (Lambda Legal, 2017a).

Senate Bill (SB) 242: The Right of a Child's Parents to Student Records. Another example of research conflicting with the current political environment concerning the rights of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ is seen in the recent introduction of bill SB 242 The Right of a Child's Parents to Student Records, by Texas Senator Konni Burton ("Relating to," 2017). If passed, SB 242 gives parents the right to access all information concerning their children, including all types of disclosures made to school staff, even if the children believe it is private. This bill is aimed at attempting to coerce school district employees, including school counselors, to share private information with a students' parents, because if they do not comply the employee is subject to discipline ("Relating to," 2017).

Research has highlighted the challenges many parents confront when their child *comes out*, publicly identifying as an individual who is LGBTQIA+. Most parents are not prepared for this information and they may even go through the stages of grief as they begin to accept their child's true identity ("Did Your," 2010). The reasons that students may choose to not tell their parents about their sexual identity are complex and students may potentially choose to confide in school staff committed to making the safety of students a priority. Adolescence is a crucial, developmental phase of acceptance and discovery of self, yet it is also a time where many struggle with the differences they display compared to their peers. There may be certain situations where confidentiality is vital in a school setting (Pope, 2003). Furthermore, school counselors are specifically directed to help students who identify as LGBTQIA+ by providing a safe space, support, advocacy and protection, and SB 242 challenges this support (ASCA, 2017b). Forcing a student to reveal their sexual identity, such as seen in the proposal of SB 242,

may be harmful to that student, revealing how U.S. society continues to promote fear and misunderstanding concerning individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (“Did Your,” 2010). The imbalance between ever changing laws concerning student confidentiality versus specific, professional codes of ethics set up to protect students creates a confusing and difficult environment for both students and professional school staff.

Conversion therapy. Political realms are not the only area influencing students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Research by Pope (2003) touches on another example of a potentially negative dynamic contributing to the confusion and concern for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+, a treatment known as conversion therapy (CT). The APA has published an accurate, accredited and updated resource handbook intended for all school personnel concerning facts about youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (APA, 2016). The purpose of the handbook is to help increase school staff awareness, give more accurate information and help decrease different forms of extreme, harmful intervention. This handbook exposes the potentially harmful therapy, known as conversion therapy (CT). CT is a major concern to many, as there is increased potential for harm to be done (APA, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) confirmed that major psychological and medical associations have denounced this pseudo-scientific-based therapy. The fact that some communities are still pursuing potentially harmful treatments on students who identify as LGBTQIA+, such as to “cure” a person’s sexuality, treating it as if it were a disease, demands more action be taken to properly educate the public, including school faculty, staff, administrators, and students (APA, 2016).

Conversion therapy has also been titled reparative therapy (RT) or sexual reorientation therapy. Pope (2003) reported that conversion therapy is strongly supported by many conservative groups and seen as a way to bring someone back to health by attempting to change

their sexual identity. School staff should be educated about myths, such as the use of conversion therapy being an effective form of treatment, as this type of therapy is known to have negative side-effects including increased depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2017).

Support and Advocacy for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

When considering the continued attempt of U.S. political leaders to pass and change laws that compromise the basic constitutional rights, privacy and safety of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, the importance of educating students becomes vital for their health and well-being. Furthermore, confusion between legal rights and ethical guidance reveals the need for school staff to rely on peer-reviewed research to illuminate effective interventions for victimized students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

In one study completed throughout certain Seattle public schools, students in several Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) groups responded to surveys about harassment, in an effort to find new, more effective interventions. Results exposed the need for more effective LGBTQIA+ support, yet they emphasized there is just as strong of a need to educate those who harass (Hillard, Love, Franks, Laris, & Coyle, 2014). This same study indicated a need for staff to follow up and respond to victimized students more consistently. Pope (2003) affirmed that school counselors need proper guidelines and information to effectively deliver critical services, such as counseling students about their sexual orientation. School should be a place of safety, yet, a lack of response from school staff towards victimized students who identify as LGBTQIA+ likely communicates an implicit message, passively approving the harassment of youth while contributing to an unsafe environment for such students (Hall et al., 2013).

When schools and families are unsupportive, children and adolescents will inevitably face negative consequences. McCabe and Robinson (2008) accentuated the reality that significant prevention of LGBTQIA+ discrimination and the deterrence of the negative effects of harassment can be school-based. Students who identify as a LGBTQIA+ are more susceptible to negative outcomes and need increased support (Espelage et al., 2008). Research highlighted the actuality that most of the high school population, including students who identify as cisgender and/or heterosexual, are uneducated on LGBTQIA+ issues (Case et al., 2009). These statistics, blended with the overall discomfort, incompetency and lack of resources/training from school counselors when dealing with LGBTQIA+, illuminate the overall need for mandated guidance towards school counselors.

Many individuals are familiar with the teachers in a school delivering most of the classroom lessons (Chang, 2009). Yet, school counselors are highly qualified and appropriate school staff members that can also educate students, staff and families, particularly about the many issues confronted by youth who identify as LGBTQIA+. Chang (2009) noted that although the classroom teachers are mainly in charge of the basic education component, they already have a heavy workload as they carry out instruction of the required curriculum. Emotional exhaustion and high burnout levels characterize the K-12 teaching profession. Furthermore, the ASCA (2017b) noted that school counselors are set apart from many educators because of their minimum training requirements. They hold at least a master's degree; therefore, their training and professional requirements yields districts with professionals who have completed graduate training and are licensed/certified educators. These counselors have unique qualifications that can be used effectively to address the needs of all students (ASCA, 2017b).

School personnel and parents should be made aware of the negative school climate influencing LGBTQIA+ students, because appropriate support should be a collective effort (ASCA, 2017a). The guardians of youth who identify LGBTQIA+ should know about the issues faced by these youth, to both help and understand them (“Did Your,” 2010). Parents may be comforted to know that there is more action being taken, at the school level, as far as protecting and educating the students. Even so, concerted efforts to address these problems are necessary, and schools in general could be more cautious and potentially take more action towards advocating, protecting and supporting students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017a).

When harassment is not adequately dealt with, negative consequences can occur. For example, the California Department of Education (2011) reported paying over a million dollars in 2003 from a California school district to six students due to harassment from other students because of their sexual orientation. The various efforts of misinformed political leaders attempting to pass laws that may hinder the constitutional rights of people who identify as LGBTQIA+ have made it vital to share helpful information and advocate for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Lee, 2016).

Student action. GLSEN (2017b) reminds us that students have the potential and right to promote community and/or school change. Student-led groups such as the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) are becoming increasingly familiar in high school across the U.S., but there are other student-centered activities that could be incorporated. As mentioned previously, it is essential to educate all students and GLSEN provides basic classroom plans that further enhance a more inclusive, tolerant and safe learning environment (PFLAG, 2017a).

Community and family resources. There are differing situations that make referrals necessary when working as a school counselor within a diverse population of students. It is vital

to make available updated and effective resources, including local resources that appropriately manage a student's mental health, physical/sexual health and/or legal/discrimination issues. Parents/guardians are often overwhelmed with misconceptions about people who identify as LGBTQIA+, it and is vital that they have support and appropriate information. When rejected by their parents after coming out, youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ reveal a higher rate of drug and alcohol use as well as suicide ("Did Your," 2010). Pope (2003) pointed out that providing essential and educational, research-based information to both parents and students is imperative. An updated contact list of local professionals should be available. This resource would help support students, parents and families in pursuing support outside of school, particularly relating to the challenges that youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ confront. The list would present contacts for locally-based legal assistance, support groups, appropriate professional mental health counselors, health centers/clinics and substance abuse treatment centers.

Legal Guidance

Alaska would not be the first state to be put in the spotlight with the need to better support their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The statewide organization in North Carolina known as *Safe Schools NC*, has made recommendations to better support North Carolina's students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Hall, 2007). Like Alaska, it was recognized that North Carolina did not have existing, sufficient statewide-laws that properly protected youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ from harassment, discrimination and/or bullying based off their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Safe Schools NC recommended certain steps to improve the educational atmosphere and school climate in North Carolina, including proper training for school personnel (Hall, 2007).

The Basics of Legislation

In most states, it is the legislative body of the state government that processes bills, initiatives and statutes. In Alaska, a citizen can initiate legislative activity through a process called an indirect initiative, also known as a ballot measure or proponent (AK State Legislature, 2015). In the state of Alaska, an idea for a bill that proposes legislation can stem from an individual citizen, a local agency, a professional group, a legislator/senator, a legislative committee or even the Governor (AK State Legislature, 2015). The concerned party may begin an initial petition, gaining a minimum number of signatures from registered Alaskan voters that support the proposed legislation. It is most common that the citizen or group also reach out to a local, state representative to be a sponsor of the bill (K. Ackerman, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

A sponsor is defined as a committee, an individual, or individuals who agrees to introduce a bill or measure (AK State Legislature, 2015). When attempting to contact a sponsor, a citizen can research local representatives and senators, analyzing their political stance on certain issues and calculating an appropriate fit for the proposed law. A citizen can also reach out and team up with appropriate, local agencies or organizations/groups, enhancing the effort.

After gaining support from a local representative, peer-reviewed research can be presented to make a case. Proper information, as seen in the literature review, would serve to highlight the need for mandated training centered on school counselors, to create a better school climate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Part of the presentation to the local representative would include the example of a potential, professional development training program, such as seen from GLSEN. One could include a sample piece of similar legislation from another state who has pursued this same goal, such as seen in the state of California.

Individuals Identifying as LGBTQIA+ in Alaska

A review of the relevant laws shows that the State of Alaska appears quite conservative in protecting individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. In their *2016 State Equality Index Report*, the HRC rated Alaska in the lowest rated category titled, *High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality*. This report revealed the reality that Alaska has done very little to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+. Moreover, there is a lack of statewide protection for students against discrimination, bullying and/or harassment involving sexual orientation in the school (HRC, 2016). This report highlights the need to promote better LGBTQIA+ resources and training among Alaskan-based school staff, such as school counselors, to protect students living in a state that does not prioritize the protection of their youth who identify as LGBTQIA+.

A 2009 survey conducted by Green (2012) with residents of Anchorage, Alaska, who identify as LGBTQIA+, reported biases, harassment and discrimination are regularly experienced by Anchorage residents. Approximately 76% of participants reported that name calling and verbal abuse was the most common form of bias, yet, intimidation, harassment and bullying were common as well. Nearly half of those surveyed reported experiencing physical violence. Green highlighted results involving Anchorage's schools and other educational institutions, in which 41% of participants reported having been harassed or bullied by other students, 14.2% confirming the perpetrator was a teacher. Green also stated that harassment was documented as occurring in Anchorage's medical settings, housing, employment as well as stemming from Anchorage police department staff.

Although the state of Alaska (AK) lacks protection for residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, the cities within Alaska continue to battle for equality (Lambda Legal, 2017c). In 2009, there were efforts made to add the terms *gender identity* and *sexual orientation* to Title 5,

the Municipality of Anchorage's equal rights code, with supporters presenting appropriate data to encourage this revision. Several Anchorage residents gave public testimony concerning their personal accounts discrimination, yet, proponents argued there was a lack of evidence of this discrimination. Although the Municipality of Anchorage required documented complaints, such as made to the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission (AERC), the AERC could not legally investigate discrimination unless it was prohibited by law, leaving the LGBTQIA+ community to document on their own. It took several decades, but finally by 2012 Anchorage successfully passed the anti-discrimination law titled *Equal Rights Ordinance AO 2015-96*, amending the Title 5 (Municipality of Anchorage, 2017).

Another supportive component for Alaskan residents who identify as LGBTQIA+ stems from Alaskans Together for Equality (ATE). This organization noted the intentions of their organization, emphasizing the history of the group's formation (ATE, 2017c). ATE was founded by a small group of citizens who gathered to influence the 2007 Ballot Measure called, *Alaskans Together*. The ballot measure inspired this group of LGBTQIA+ grassroots advocates to continue meeting and this was the beginning of a nonpartisan, nonprofit political organization focused on supporting Alaskans who identify as LGBTQIA+.

ATE (2017a) noted that they were currently following a bill in the Alaska legislator titled *House Joint Resolution (HJR)*. HJR 1 is a constitutional amendment bill that would repeal the ban on same-sex marriage. This bill is still pending, sitting with the Alaska House State Affairs Committee. ATE remains hopeful that Alaska will pass a statewide, inclusive non-discrimination bill focusing on protecting Alaskan residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, at some point soon (ATE, 2017a).

Recently, Alaska legislators introduced Senate Bill (SB) 72, also known as *Discrimination: Gender ID; Sexual Orientation*. SB 72 would expand the state's existing anti-discrimination laws, while adding additional protection to Alaskans identifying as LGBTQIA+ who confront housing, employment and financing/credit discrimination (Alaska State Legislator, 2016). The bill SB 72, the *Discrimination: Gender ID; Sexual Orientation* bill, is being reviewed by legislators

Professional Development for Counselors

GLSEN

GLSEN is a leading educational resource for students, schools, staff and community members, aiming to provide affirming and safe education for every student (GLSEN, 2017a). They have focused on the issues that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ regularly confront, incorporating a variety of methods to ensure an inclusive environment for these students. GLSEN strategies include: conducting their own original and extensive research, partnering with both national education organizations and leading decision makers as well as authoring resources that are accurate and developmentally appropriate. Furthermore, they encourage student-led efforts that have the potential for a positive impact on both schools and their communities. GLSEN promotes several activities, trainings and other tools such as educator guides, curriculums and lesson plans that help support a safer and more affirming school environment. Educator resources include guides, curriculum and lesson plans. Their professional development resources are categorized into three groups: toolkits, webinars and workshops (GLSEN, 2017b).

There is an assortment of GLSEN educator programs guides available. These guides cover a variety of central LGBTQIA+ topics and there is something for every grade level K-12 (GLSEN, 2017b). The current GLSEN programs include:

- *Hairspray*: A Discussion Guide for educators and students
- School Climate and HIV Risk
- Heather Has Two Mommies Turns 25
- Educator Events Calendar
- LGBT History Month, Get the Facts: Realities of LGBT Students
- Libraries as Safe Spaces
- Valentine Road: Watch
- Discuss and Act, Back to School Guide for Educators
- Celebrate NEA's Read Across America: Lessons for Grades K-5
- Working with LGBT Students of Color: A Guide for Educators
- ThinkB4YouSpeak guide for Educators Grades 6-12
- LGBT Pride Month for Educators
- Ally Week Guide for Educators,
- Day of Silence Guide for Educators
- Ready, Set, Respect! Elementary Toolkit, Game Plans: P.E Teachers, Coaches, Administrators & Parents,
- GLSEN Safe Space Kit: Be an Ally to LGBT Youth!
- LGBT –Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators (GLSEN, 2017b).

Hansen (2015) pointed out that the GLSEN website offers many helpful resources for educators such as links, upcoming event information, back to school guides, teaching material and public relations material. GLSEN also presents custom professional development workshops for the variety of educators. Furthermore, certain activities that are offered through GLSEN, such as the ThinkB4YouSpeak guide for Educators Grades 6-12, have been effectively

integrated and used in classrooms anywhere from 25 students to 140 students (Hansen, 2015).

The ThinkB4YouSpeak Educator's Guide gives a list of questions to be used as prompts to initiate a class or group discussion. This guide also presents definitions of terms that involve youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Hansen, 2015).

Another popular and valuable resource offered through the GLSEN website is known as the Safe Space Kit. This kit acts as a guide for the educator to help create a visible, positive and safe learning environment for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (GLSEN, 2015). The Safe Space Kit is also an affordable resource, as there is only a one-time \$20 fee and the educator receives a resourceful 42-page guide that presents specific strategies as well as informative stickers and posters to further help school educators set up their safe space (GLSEN, 2015). Research data presented by Mayberry (2006) highlighted that school-based safe spaces relate to positive student outcomes on an individual level, providing increased self-esteem, academic gains and decreased social isolation. The GLSEN ThinkB4YouSpeak guide for Educators Grades 6-12 and the Safe Space Kit are only two examples of effective resources that school counselors could incorporate into their personal resources.

An evaluation of GLSEN's Safe Space Kit stated that educators found great value in the kit and it added to a more inclusive school environment (GLSEN, 2015). More specifically, the kit helped educators become more aware of the experience of a student who identifies as LGBTQIA+, highlighting specific issues, while simultaneously presenting skills and strategies to further support an improved school climate for all students. The Safe Space Kit is the foundation training kit included in GLSEN's professional development trainings (I. Regidor, personal communication, March 9, 2017). This kit works to help engage a school wide effort to create an

affirming environment for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, but it also serves as a basic information kit to help further educate school staff and the community (GLSEN, 2015).

New York City (NYC) Respect for All (RFA) Training. In 2009, the New York City (NYC) Department of Education partnered with five non-profit organizations to create a two-day intensive training called Respect for All (RFA). This training was aimed at specific school staff with the goal of having at least one staff member trained in each school in the district, with the capability of supporting students who identify as LGBTQIA+. These support staff would further serve as a vital resource to the school and community, passing on information shared in the training which centered around bias-based bullying, intimidation and harassment. GLSEN was the main organization to provide training curriculum content to the RFA program (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010). Peer-reviewed research conducted by Greytak and Kosciw (2010) concluded that the NYC RFA training is vital not only to improve the school climate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, but it also helps improve the climate for all individuals in the community.

Application

For this project, professional school counselors in the State of Alaska are the main, specified audience, as they are ethically bound to support and advocate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017a). The ASCA (2017a) pointed out that school counselors should be promoting respect and equal opportunity for all individuals, no matter their gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. In order to effectively help students who identify as LGBTQIA+, appropriate information and guidance should be shared with professional school counselors.

The attached, supplemental guidebook provides a reference toward making the case to legally mandate school counselors to receive the essential training needed to create more inclusive and safer Alaskan schools. The guidebook will serve as a tool to help community members further support the proposed legislation. It will include sample letter templates addressing the main stakeholders involved with this project such as: local senators and representatives, Alaskan school district superintendents, Alaskan secondary school counselors/Alaska School Counselor Association, as well as Alaskan families and students. In addition, the guidebook will feature a list of appropriate and legitimate resources that properly address and represent the various issues experienced by individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+.

School Counselor Action

There is a need to mandate Alaskan school counselors to use accurate and helpful information so they can provide proper education as well as a comprehensive, standardized, updated resource guide to properly support, protect and advocate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. However, resource and guidance should involve all students, possibly even all school staff, focusing on the education of LGBTQIA+ concerns/issues and prevention towards the discrimination of this population. Responding, on a school level includes several dynamics, and minimally, it requires students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who are willing to learn and empower self. Greene, Fisher, Kuper, Andrews and Mustanski (2015) highlighted the evidence that LGBTQIA+ youth deal with unique concerns, mainly relationship-oriented risks, underlining interpersonal/domestic violence, unplanned pregnancy, and HIV/STD infection. Russell, Koslow, Horn, and Saewyc (2010) indicated that school staff should be encouraged to receive training that centered around goals such as the creation of a school environment that is inclusive and affirming.

School counselors could share vital information with students, other school staff and families. According to research presented by Espelage et al. (2008), parental support blended with a positive school climate protects youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ from drug use and depression. School counselors should be required to be familiar with some resources and utilize appropriate classroom discussions for all students. On top of this, school counselors should be required to promote student-led groups that further advocate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Lastly, school counselors should be required to be familiar with and make available an updated, resource list for potential referrals to students, staff and/or family members.

School counselors could be utilizing effective and up-to-date professional training development, especially with the current atmosphere that continues to question and challenge the constitutional rights of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. Furthermore, there are effective and professional trainings available, such as seen through GLSEN. GLSEN offers professional development workshops for school districts and communities, presented as a comprehensive approach that advocates for inclusive and safe schools (GLSEN, 2017a).

School-based resources and training

Bidell (2012) emphasized that there is an opportunity for professional school counselors to address the emotional, educational and social problems that bisexual, gay, transgender, lesbian and questioning youth face. When looking at the delivery component of the ASCA (2017b) standards, school counselors are to provide direct, student services and this includes a school counseling core curriculum that is to be presented through the main school curriculum, providing appropriate attitude, skills and knowledge for that developmental level. Furthermore, school counselors display defining characteristics that distinguish them as effective leaders in addressing issues related to sexual orientation within schools. These characteristics include

proper training in child/adolescent development and systems perspective as well as an underlying dedication toward diversity (Depaul et al., 2009).

There are numerous, respected resources to support students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and their families, as well as the school counselors working with them. Research previously highlighted the need to educate all students concerning topics/issues affecting people who identify as LGBTQIA+ (PFLAG, 2017a). However, at a minimum, students who identify as LGBTQIA+ should be provided with proper information, referrals and resources from their school counselors.

It is advised that schools make accurate information accessible, including proper reporting procedures of harassment/bullying while also presenting risk factors and proper resources for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Russell et al., 2010). There are several national organizations that are devoted to providing vital information and guidance to educators, including the U.S. Department of Education, the ASCA, the GLSEN, Lambda Legal, PFLAG National and ATE.

Conclusion

Pope (2003) revealed that there is a lack of school support for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, realistically stemming from the lack of guidance and appropriate response from school boards and school staff. Approximately 75% of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported some sort of victimization occurring during their school day that was based off their sexual-orientation (Kosciw et al., 2014). Although school counselors report a lack of competency concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+, they are not required to utilize professional information and training.

In the state of Alaska, there is minimal legal protection for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ATE, 2017c). Clearly, students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are struggling, and research presented by Rutter (2006) highlighted the frightening reality that the number one cause of death for a student who identifies as LGBTQIA+ is suicide. School counselors are asked to remove barriers that stand in the way of achievement and development of students who identify as LGBTQIA+, promoting equal opportunity for every student, no matter their identity (ASCA, 2017b). Furthermore, school counselors are in the most appropriate position to be given information and facts concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+. However, to properly help students in the state of Alaska, school counselors must be mandated to acquire appropriate training and resources, as they are not receiving this training on their own. There are professional development trainings available that have peer-reviewed evidence in support, such as seen in several of GLSEN's programs (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010). Any training done through GLSEN can then be shared with the rest of the school staff and any potential community or family members.

The supplemental guidebook included as part of this project provides a reference toward making the case to legally mandate school counselors to receive the essential training needed to create more inclusive and safer Alaskan schools, incorporating the project's research and transforming it into a tool. On top of this, the supplemental guidebook acts as a sort of manual for other members of the community who may want to support the proposal of a legislative effort towards a mandate that serves to better protect students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

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Appendix A

A Guidebook for Advocacy, Support and Resources for Alaskan Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

A Guidebook of Advocacy, Support and Resources
for Alaskan Students Who Identify As LGBTQIA+

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Table of Contents

	Pages
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	4
The Purpose of the Guidebook	6
Related Terminology	7
Guiding Communication to State and Local Representatives	8
The Process of Mandating New Legislation	9
Overview of Alaskan Law	9
Steps towards Legislation	10
Examples of Education-Focused Legislation in Alaska	12
House Bill (HB) 44: Alaska Safe Children’s Act of 2015	12
Example Legislation Towards Protection and Advocacy for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+	13
Safe Place to Learn Act of 2016, or Assembly Bill 394 (AB 394) ...	13
The FAIR Education Act of 2011, or Senate Bill 48 (SB 48)	14
Professional Development Training Options for School Counselors	14
GLSEN	14
Additional Information Highlighting GLSEN Programs	15
Increasing Support Efforts	16
Example Letters of Support to Potential Sponsors/ Stakeholders	16
Suggestions About How to Structure Letters of Support	17
What is Next?	17
Associated Costs	18

Conclusion	19
Additional Resources	21
References	26
Appendices	
Appendix A PFLAG National Glossary of Terms	31
Appendix B Sample Letter to an Alaskan Senator to Request Sponsorship .	37
Appendix C Sample Letter to Alaskan School District Superintendents	41
Appendix D Sample Letter to Alaskan Secondary School Counselors and Alaska's ASCA	45
Appendix E Sample Letter to Alaskan Students and Families	52

Introduction

This guidebook functions as a reference tool for building a case to legally mandate school counselors to receive the professional training needed to create safer Alaskan schools. These efforts are vital because youth confront a variety of obstacles during their adolescent and teenage years, particularly living in modern society where there is growing tension among increasingly diverse populations. Although there is overwhelming agreement from major health, medical and mental health professionals that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are healthy and normal human expressions, individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ continue to struggle on many levels (APA, 2016). For example, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) *2016 State Equality Index Report* revealed that the State of Alaska has done very little to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+. Although there is current effort towards legislation that would serve to protect individuals who live in Alaska and identify as LGBTQIA+, it does not include the requirement of professional training for educators working with Alaskan students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The HRC notes that Alaska lacks state-based law that could potentially help support students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

This guidebook is designed to act as an advocacy manual for the reader. The goals of this guidebook include:

- ✓ increasing awareness
- ✓ acquiring and guiding advocacy
- ✓ encouraging collaboration
- ✓ garnering support for legislative action

Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are struggling as bullying continues to be a major issue in middle and high schools. The following statements highlight key factors for consideration regarding the status of students identifying as LGBTQIA+.

(SEE Glossary in APPENDIX A for explanation of LGBTQIA+ and other terms)

- A recent nationwide survey taken by 7,800 students who identify as LGBTQIA+ revealed that at least half did not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009)
- Youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to experience severe depression and suicidal feelings. They are also more vulnerable to using alcohol and/or drugs as a coping mechanism, compared to other youth (Espelage et al., 2008)
- Research conducted in educational institutions in Anchorage, Alaska revealed:
 - 41% of students who identified as LGBTQIA+ reported being harassed or bullied by other students,
 - 14.2% of these students confirmed the perpetrator was a teacher, and
 - harassment also occurred in Anchorage's medical services, housing areas, employment settings, and police departments
 (Green, 2012)

Although adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school counselors and friends, this action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013). A significant portion of a student's time is spent on school property and, when you realize the high rate of victimization towards students who identify as LGBTQIA+, a clear message begins to manifest itself, revealing a need for additional support from school staff. A review of state-based legislation preventing violence and bullying in schools based on a student's gender identity,

gender expression and/or sexual identity shows that Alaska has been deficient in the past concerning support in this area (Alaskans Together for Equality, 2017).

The Purpose of the Guidebook

This guidebook provides a resource for counselors. It provides a reference for making the case to legally mandate school counselors to receive the essential training needed to create inclusive and safe Alaskan schools. This guidebook has been produced because of a graduate project that incorporates statewide legislative efforts directed at Alaska's school counselors, while integrating peer-reviewed research and resources.


The guidebook displays a plan that clearly outlines steps to propose a mandate clarifying that Alaskan school counselors receive training regarding education about students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, are ethically called to facilitate the elimination of barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). Part of this guidebook includes statistics, a glossary of important terms and sample letters to the stakeholders in positions of influence for legislative action. There is also a list of appropriate resources and training materials that every school counselor should have available, to properly support students who identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as school staff, and, family members of the students.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) clearly states that school counselors will promote respect, equal opportunity and, affirmation for every student, regardless of gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation (ASCA, 2017). However, school counselors report decreased competency when working with students who identify as LGBTQIA+, exposing a need for more specialized, continued professional development and training in this area (Bidell, 2012). Previous state legislation focuses on teachers as the main

audience, but most law should be understood and followed through by all school personnel to affect change. McCabe and Robinson (2008) pointed out that psychologists and counselors will need to become like teachers, getting more specified training to deal with issues and difficulties faced by the students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Looking at Alaska's school system, school counselors and other staff are not required to receive any kind of professional training that could help them further support and advocate for their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Because this training is not required and peer-reviewed data strongly indicates that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are greatly struggling, there is a need to legally mandate school counselors to receive appropriate professional development training.

Related Terminology



Effective advocacy and legislative action for students identifying as LGBTQIA+ requires familiarity with important terms. The organization called PFLAG National (2017b), formerly known as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, explains that the vocabulary embracing sexual orientation and gender continues to evolve and there is a lack of agreement concerning universal terminology. However, they also point out the importance of using terminology properly, to continue clarifying any misconceptions about people who identify as LGBTQIA+. Combining people who identify as LGBTQIA+ into one group creates implications for the process of analyzing and understanding the LGBTQIA+ identities, and it often breaks the groups into two subcategories: heterosexual and non-heterosexual or sexual minority vs. non-minority (Parent et al., 2013). Therefore, effective advocates keep in mind the diversity of people, who identify as LGBTQIA+ and their experiences (Espelage et al., 2008).

Note to Reader: Please take extra time to examine and assimilate these terms as to better understand the issues at hand (SEE APPENDIX A).

Guiding Communication to State and Local Representatives

Note to Reader: When working to garner support from local senators and/or representatives for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, it is essential to be knowledgeable of relevant, current and peer-reviewed research, such as the data presented below.

Statistics Illustrating the Hardships Faced by Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

- 74.1% stated they had been harassed verbally (Case et al., 2009).
- 36.2% said they were harassed physically (Case et al., 2009).
- Approximately 50% experienced cyberbullying (Schneider et al., 2012).
- School staff were reported to be taking part in the verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- Expanding technology, in the form of social media, can be used as a weapon in high school, intensifying the attack. Examples include texting, Snapchat, Facebook, and/or Twitter (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012).
- More than half stated that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- Youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression, and to utilize alcohol and/or other drugs as a coping mechanism (Espelage et al., 2008).
- Victimized students who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a lower grade point average and communicate decreased post-secondary education plans (Kosciw et al., 2014).

- School-based victimization may last for a lifetime, as students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported a decreased desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- At least 1/3 of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+.
 - Homelessness for this population is most commonly due to feelings of rejection from family related to gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Durso & Gates, 2012).
 - Youth who encounter homelessness and identify as LGBTQIA+ experience intense needs, presenting a high rate of substance use, mental health problems, violent victimization, suicidal actions, and a variety of HIV-risk behaviors (Keuroghlian, Shtasel & Bassuk, 2014).

The Process of Mandating New Legislation

An Overview of Alaskan Law

In addition to understanding important statistics for communicating with local legislators and representatives, advocates need to be familiar with the process of legislation. In the United States (U.S.), there are differing levels of law, such as federal and state law. Since this guidebook is focused on Alaskan students and school counselors, it is state law that will be reviewed. Harrison (2012) contributes an overview of the *Constitution of the State of Alaska*, stating that it is the state's own constitution that builds the basic framework of each state's government. Alaska's Constitution emphasizes the notion that political power resides within the people and should work to better the entire population (Harrison, 2012).

To better understand the formation of legislative efforts by a citizen, it is essential to understand the basics of state law. Harrison (2012) notes that a legislature is one of three government branches that also includes an executive and judicial branch. However, it is the legislative branch that creates the laws. Alaska's Legislature has a House of Representatives and a Senate, which are both involved in voting on whether a bill becomes a law.

A bill, also known as a measure, is a proposed law introduced to the legislature. Once the bill becomes a law and is passed by the legislature it is then titled an Act or Statute. An initiative or referendum is a more progressive route that a bill takes to become law, and a state's citizens can use this path to exercise their constitutional right, proposing new law at a state level (AK State Legislature, 2015b). However, only 27 of the U.S. states incorporate this type of direct democracy, including Alaska, to help keep the legislature in check (Harrison, 2012).

Every state in the U.S. has a different method towards formatting a bill proposal and Alaska's route is through indirect initiative statutes. These initiatives require the idea for the proposed law to go through the state legislature first. Then, the legislature can adopt this bill outright with a majority vote or put the proposed bill on the ballot for state voters to decide (Kyrene, n.d.). The term mandate refers to an official order or direction made by a person of authority and is primarily used for referring to state constitutional, executive or legislative law (AK State Legislature, 2015).

Steps Towards Legislation



Citizen(s) or other groups/organizations may draft and begin an initial petition, gaining a minimum number of signatures from registered Alaskan voters who support the proposed legislation. The Alaska Information Officer from the local legislative office notes that it is most

common for a citizen or group to reach out to a local, state representative or senator to be a sponsor of the bill (K. Ackerman, personal communication, April 3, 2017). However, as far as soliciting a legislator or senator to propose a bill or pursuing a petition, some cases may justify both recruiting a sponsor and preparing a petition (K. Ackerman, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

A sponsor is defined as a committee, an individual, or individuals who agree to introduce a bill or measure (AK State Legislature, 2015). When reaching out to a sponsor, a citizen can research local representatives, analyzing their political stance on certain issues and calculate an appropriate fit for the proposed law. A citizen can also team up with appropriate local agencies or organizations/groups enhancing the effort. Lambda Legal is a non-profit organization that aims to legally help lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and everyone living with through HIV education, impact litigation, and public policy work (Lambda Legal, 2017). For example, concerning the rights of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, one of Lambda Legal's representatives, H. Lam, advised that interested citizens should connect with Alaskans Together for Equality to partner and consolidate efforts with this like-minded non-profit group (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

To gain the support of a sponsor, such as an Alaskan Senator or Representative, a citizen or group can present research, outlining the need for the proposed law. Once the sponsor steps in and hopefully accepts the position of support/sponsorship for the bill, the bill is usually sent to be professionally drafted through the appropriate legal services. Afterwards, it is presented to the House or Senate (K. Ackerman, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

If a bill successfully overcomes its first obstacle by gaining appropriate sponsorship, a more official bill is then drafted and a first reading may occur. The first reading is where the

chief clerk or secretary provides a more formal introduction of the bill, and at this point the bill may be referred to a specific committee. During the second reading, amendments can be made and if the bill successfully passes to a third reading, it is open for debate (AK State Legislature, 2015). The next section of this guidebook provides an example of state law and supportive information that could help guide advocates towards legislation supporting students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Example of Education-Focused Legislation in Alaska

Although the State of Alaska lacks basic legislation to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, the state's professional educators have been some of the first groups to begin presenting and favoring legislation to support Alaskan students. An example of legislation recently passed that serves to further protect these students is House Bill (HB) 44, the Alaska Safe Children's Act of 2015.

House Bill (HB) 44: Alaska Safe Children's Act of 2015.

- Providence Health and Services (2015) reported statistics from the Child Welfare League of America, revealing that the state of Alaska is in the top five states for the highest rates of child abuse in the country.
- 50% of the women in Alaska have reported sexual violence, intimate partner violence or both, with statistics influencing the female student population as well (UAA Justice Center, 2010).
- Before the passing of the Alaska Safe Children's Act of 2015, there was a lack of federal legislation that focused on prevention through education when concerning child sexual abuse and dating violence prevention.

Note to Reader: The basic nature of HB 44, or the Alaska Safe Children’s Act of 2015, is to connect Alaska’s education system with useful training, as seen in the form of an age-appropriate curriculum that is focused on awareness and prevention efforts concerning both sexual abuse and dating violence. The audience of HB 44 is teachers and other mandatory reporters, K-12. This bill is similar in nature to the proposals laid out in this guidebook.

Example Legislation Towards Protecting and Advocating for Students Who Identify as LGBTQIA+

In addition to understanding the legislative process and examples of successful legislative action, it is important to consider the efforts made by other states in support of students identifying as LGBTQIA+. Although Alaska has yet to implement any statewide legislation that is focused on protecting youth who identify as LGBTQIA+, other states are much more progressive. For example, the state of California has already implemented several state-based mandates that prohibit school bullying and cyberbullying, and the terms *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* have been added into these exemplary state laws (Lambda Legal, 2017). The following information highlights some of California’s most recent, successfully implemented bills that serve to protect California’s students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Safe Place to Learn Act of 2016, or Assembly Bill 394 (AB 394). The Safe Place to Learn Act of 2016 directs the California Department of Education to regularly monitor schools to ensure they have adopted harassment and discrimination policies, while also clearly presenting methods to receive and investigate reports. AB 394 also states that information concerning resources, training and curricula that directly address bias-motivated discrimination be available (Lambda Legal, 2017).

The FAIR Education Act of 2011, or Senate Bill 48 (SB 48). This act mandates that California Schools, K-12, give accurate and fair representations of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as individuals with disabilities (Lambda Legal, 2017).

Professional Development Training Options for School Counselors

Note to Reader: When HB 44 the Alaska Safe Children's Act of 2015 was passed, there were attached documents presenting specific recommendations for curriculum options (AK Legislature, 2014). The following organization is an example of a professional, educational organization that could be utilized to help properly educate school counselors on LGBTQIA+ issues.

GLSEN

Since 1999, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, also known as GLSEN, has been a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating toward affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research and educational material aimed at safer, more inclusive educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (GLSEN, 2017).

GLSEN offers:

- Activities
- Trainings
- Educator guides
- Curriculums
- Lesson plans
- Professional development workshops

- Resources: toolkits, webinars, and workshops

Additional Information Highlighting GLSEN Programs

- ✓ *ThinkB4YouSpeak guide for Educators Grades 6-12*, has been effectively integrated and used in classrooms anywhere from 25 students to 140 students (Hansen, 2015).
- ✓ *New York City Respect for All professional training, (NYC RFA)*, was vital to improve the school climate for NYC students who identify as LGBTQIA+, but it also enhanced the climate for all individuals in the community (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010).
- ✓ *GLSEN Safe Space Kit* presents a tool to guide creating a safe space for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. School-based safe spaces relate to positive student outcomes on an individual level, providing academic gains, increased self-esteem, and decreased social isolation (Mayberry, 2006).

There are several routes that could be pursued in efficiently networking, sharing resources, and information from the GLSEN trainings. For example, school counselors could be selected from the Alaska School Counselor Association to be trained as trainers in a workshop through GLSEN. Then, during the state's annual school counselor conference, these trained individuals could train other school counselors. From there, certain counselors could be trained from each of Alaska's districts, returning to their home district and further these training efforts by offering the training to fellow counselors, faculty and staff. Alaska has an extensive

video/audio conferencing network. These technology tools could be utilized to expand these training opportunities to counselors, faculty, and staff in rural Alaska. Once each school has one or two counselors trained, those counselors can give a schoolwide presentation, ensuring that each educator in the building is aware of information that could help their students.

Increasing Support Efforts

To gain momentum towards the potential for legislation, there are certain steps that can be taken to increase support. The previously highlighted bill, HB 44, also known as the Alaska Safe Children's Act of 2015, is a strong model for this guidebook's proposed initiative, as it demonstrates how support was built over time, resulting in the final passing of the bill into law. Letters of support can originate from the state's own citizens and members of the Alaska Legislature, as well as individuals representing larger groups or organizations (Kyrene, n.d.).

Example Letters of Support to Potential Sponsors/ Stakeholders

As mentioned previously, letters of support are helpful tools in the process of an initiative or bill becoming a law. When a citizen is pursuing support, peer-reviewed research and data may be presented to encourage others to become involved in the initiative. For example, a citizen or group could present research, through a letter or an email, addressing Alaskan school districts, school counselors, the students, and the student's families. These letters or other communication outline key points that support the need for the law, offering the proposed idea for the bill while encouraging these individuals or entities to write and express their own support.

The appendix to this guidebook displays sample letters exemplifying the process of building a case for legislative action (SEE Appendices B-E). The letters are addressed to a variety of recipients who are considered stakeholders in this project, including local senators and

representatives, school district superintendents, school counselors/Alaskan Chapter of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), Alaskan families, and students.

Suggestions about how to structure letters of support

- ✓ Establish yourself as someone credible in your community, expressing that you are a constituent and a citizen of your state who is concerned about the issue at hand.
- ✓ Introduce the most salient concerns, presenting research, peer-reviewed data, and other useful resources to support the main point(s).
- ✓ Propose a solution to the concern, offering potential answers or guidance.
- ✓ Wrap up your letter with an appreciative sendoff.

What Is Next?

Currently, Alaska has Senate Bill (SB) 72, also known as the Discrimination: Gender ID; Sexual Orientation Act of 2017, is being reviewed by legislators. SB 72 would expand the state's existing anti-discrimination laws while adding additional protection to Alaskans identifying as LGBTQIA+ who confront housing, employment, and financing/credit discrimination. Many of the local community letters opposing this anti-discrimination law reflect a strong sense of fear, stemming from non-factual opinions and value systems. This fear potentially feeds the ongoing societal norm that individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+ are somehow not deserving of choice, such as deciding who they will marry, which bathroom they want to use or where they can live or work without fear of discrimination.

Gaining community support for legislation that protects youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ is vital, beginning with the acquisition of sponsorship from major stakeholders. As previously mentioned, legislation that is focused on increasing professional training for educators

is not a new concept. Furthermore, there is accessible opportunity to connect to accredited educational opportunities, such as seen in the professional development tools offered through GLSEN.

Whereas this guidebook's primary focus is on securing legislation mandating that the school counselors receive training to support students who identify as LGBTQIA+, and potentially train other school faculty and staff, other areas of vulnerability surfaced concerning Alaskans who identify as LGBTQIA+. For example, Lambda Legal emphasized the importance to advocate for state-based law that protects Alaskan residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, particularly in areas of housing, employment, and public accommodation discrimination (H. Lam, personal communication, January 30, 2017). After speaking to a representative through GLSEN, it was discovered that there is also a need for an Alaskan based GLSEN chapter, as there are no chapters currently active in this state (I. Regidor, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Given the large amount of advocacy and legislation action necessary to support Alaskans identifying as LGBTQIA+, coordinated efforts are necessary to garner the required support from key stakeholders. Policy makers and school district administrators are two subgroups of stakeholders from whom support is necessary. As such, the costs associated with the passage of legislation to support the LGBTQIA+ community in Alaska is an important consideration given the state's current budgetary crises. The concern is addressed below in relation to the costs associated with training school counselors to support students who identify as LGBTQIA+.


Associated Costs

As seen in the model Alaskan legislation HB 44, or the Alaskan Safe Children's Act of 2015, there was a fiscal note linked to the documents in HB 44, revealing a zero-dollar amount in

each category. There was also a document attached with a brief description stating that the cost of implementing a sexual abuse and dating violence awareness/prevention program would reside within each school district. Furthermore, the potential for grant money to be incorporated into the costs of the program(s) was noted (AK State Legislator, 2016).

The field director at GLSEN, the exemplary organization presented as a professional development training option for school counselors, had indicated that the length, content, and cost of training is negotiable training (I. Regidor, personal communication, March 9, 2017). The director also noted that in 2009, when GLSEN helped New York City's School District provide a two-day intensive training to school staff titled Respect for All (RFA), the Department of Education covered the costs of the training.

Conclusion



People who identify as LGBTQIA+ continue to battle for equal rights, and there are several examples of how misunderstanding, potentially stemming from a lack of scientific research and education, greatly influences legal and social systems. Lambda Legal (2017) points out an increasing amount of legislation presenting bills that challenge the basic rights of certain U.S. citizens, including U.S. students who identify as LGBTQIA+. They state that constantly disputing these rights promotes the hurtful message that individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ are somehow not deserving of the same protections and privacy as other U.S. citizens are allowed, and this population is left vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Furthermore, adolescence is a time of increased vulnerability, particularly for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Sue & Sue, 2013).

In their *2016 State Equality Index Report*, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) exposed a discouraging reality that Alaska has done very little to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+, and this includes Alaskan students (HRC, 2016). Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, are well-positioned to contribute to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). Professional training for Alaskan school counselors could be mandated through Alaska's legislative process with the goal of increasing support to Alaskan students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Safe and supportive schools are vital for a student's education, and the ASCA (2017) reminds professional school counselors that they should have appropriate community resources for both families and students available at all times, while also promoting guidelines that advocate for equitable education. Professional school counselors should be supporting policies that successfully reduce harassment and bullying, as well as assisting students to appropriately and effectively confront discrimination from others (ASCA, 2017). Alaska's school counselors require direction to properly pursue ethical obligations and this could be accomplished through a legislative mandate that legally requires this type of training.

Additional Resources



○ **United States (U.S.) Department of Education: <https://www.ed.gov/>**

Sources through the U.S. Department of Education advocate for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, stressing the disproportionate discipline practices in classrooms across the country that feed discrimination against these students. It is also noted that this population makes up nearly 15% of the juvenile population within the justice system.

There are four things that educators can do to improve the school climate for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+: be visible and proactive for LGBTQIA+ students, identify *safe spaces* within the school, encourage student-led and organized clubs that promote a more inclusive school environment, and in general school staff should be aware of the common mental health issues of this population (U.S. Dept. of Ed., n.d.).

○ **American School Counselor Association (ASCA): <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/>**

The ASCA ethical standards lay out specific guidance for school counselors concerning their role with students who identify as LGBTQIA+, and these responsibilities include:

- ❖ role-modeling language that is inclusive concerning gender identity and sexual orientation,
- ❖ counseling in an accepting and nonjudgmental manner when students' feelings surface about their gender identity and/or sexual orientation as well as feelings about how others identify or accept,
- ❖ promoting policies that advocate for equitable education,

- ❖ advocating for students who are gender nonconforming concerning safe access to building facilities,
- ❖ promoting policies that successfully reduce harassment, bullying, and the use of offensive language while improving climate,
- ❖ providing spaces that are safe such as the Gay and Straight Alliance Club (GSA),
- ❖ encouraging understanding and acceptance of all staff and students' diversity as well as diverse family systems,
- ❖ supporting an inclusive curriculum that includes K-12,
- ❖ supporting students to appropriately and effectively confront discrimination by school staff members
- ❖ making available appropriate community resources for both families and students (ASCA, 2017).

○ **Lambda Legal: <http://www.lambdalegal.org/>**

Lambda Legal has worked for decades toward the acceptance of youth, adult professionals, and family members who identify as LGBTQIA+, particularly in the areas of organized youth activities and schools (Lambda Legal, 2017). This organization has also been the first to negotiate with the federal court and help bring the first-ever federal court settlement that protects the constitutional rights of youth at school who identify as LGBTQIA+. Because of their known advocacy and legal assistance towards people who identify as LGBTQIA +, especially in the education field, Lambda Legal is an essential part of the school counselor's resource/referral list.

○ **PFLAG: <https://www.pflag.org/>**

The organization known as PFLAG strives to ensure that people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are valued by society. PFLAG is known for offering effective resource for family members, parents/guardians, and/or friends of students who identify as LGBTQIA+. PFLAG has more than 500 chapters dispersed around all fifty states in the U.S. (“Did Your,” 2010). PFLAG advocates by offering education as well as peer-to-peer support concerning community issue, laws, and policies. PFLAG strives to promote an environment of respect by directly working with school, stakeholders, and the community to provide resources/creative programs, training, support, and model policy. One of their programs, *Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All*, is known as their umbrella program and it helps raise awareness towards the issues facing youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ (PFLAG, 2017).

PFLAG (2017) lists ten things that can be done to make a school safer such as: learning the facts, understanding language, stopping bad behavior, setting proper policy, planning school-wide activities, addressing cyberbullying, training and educating everyone, working towards comprehensive health education, and providing proper resources.

○ **The Trevor Project: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>**

The name stems from the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film *TREAVOR*, this organization provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to youth ages 13-24 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ). The Trevor Project has a mission to end suicide among youth who identify as LGBTQIA+. This organization follows four strategies such as: crises counseling,

resources, a sense of community, education about suicide prevention as well as methods of learning to detect risk and properly respond.

○ **Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA): <http://www.glma.org/>**

The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) has been supported and promoted by the American Medical Association (AMA) as an essential patient resource for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. The GLMA has over 30 years of experience and is a major supporter in the effort to promote the well-being and health of individuals and families who identify LGBTQIA+. The GLMA prioritizes healthcare equality and promotes this through advocacy, policy, and education. Their resources are focused on patients, providers and/or researchers.

Additional GLSEN Educator Resources: <https://www.glsen.org/>

- *Hairspray*: A Discussion Guide for educators and students
- School Climate and HIV Risk
- Heather Has Two Mommies Turns 25
- Educator Events Calendar
- LGBT History Month, Get the Facts: Realities of LGBT Students
- Libraries as Safe Spaces
- Valentine Road: Watch
- Discuss and Act, Back to School Guide for Educators
- Working with LGBT Students of Color: A Guide for Educators
- ThinkB4YouSpeak guide for Educators Grades 6-12

- LGBT Pride Month for Educators
- Ally Week Guide for Educators,
- Day of Silence Guide for Educators
- GLSEN Safe Space Kit: Be an Ally to LGBT Youth!
- LGBT –Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators

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Appendix A

PFLAG National Glossary of Terms

Permission was given by PFLAG (2017a) to include this glossary in the project, courtesy of PFLAG National, copyright 2017

Affirmed gender: The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like “new gender” or “chosen gender,” which imply that the current gender was not always a person’s gender or that the gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

Agender: A person who does not identify with any gender.

Ally: A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Whereas allies to the LGB community typically identify as straight, allies to the transgender community also come from the LGBQ community.

Androgyne: An androgynous individual

Androgynous: A non-binary gender identity typically used to describe a person’s appearances or clothing.

Asexual: An individual who does not experience sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, while asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors. Some asexual individuals do have sex, for a variety of reasons.

Assigned sex: The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child’s visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

Assumed gender: The gender a person is assumed to be based on the sex they are assigned at birth.

Biological sex: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, genes, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often confused or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

Bisexual: An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to the same gender and different genders. Sometimes stated as “bi.” People who are bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with people of the same or different genders and, in fact, need not have had any sexual experience at all; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Cisgender: A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, or an ally who is not open about their support for people who are LGBTQ.

Coming out: For most people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as “disclosing” by the transgender community. Individuals often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender/gender-nonconforming identity within themselves first, and then may choose to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth or adults when they reveal to others their connection to an LGBTQ person or the community. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

Disclosure: A word that some people use intently and others avoid with equal intent, preferring to use the term “coming out” to describe the act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, while others prefer disclosure, finding “coming out” offensive.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the word “gay” to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Gender: A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as male, female, a mixture of both, or neither.

Gender-affirming surgery (GAS): Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender

person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.” Sometimes referred to as sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), genital reconstruction surgery, or medical transition.

Gender binary: The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

Gender expansive: Also “gender creative,” (or medically, “gender variant”). An umbrella term sometimes used to describe children and youth that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify with being either male or female, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the male and female binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (see “Preferred Gender Pronouns”). They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.

Gender expression: The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people’s understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to recognize is that an individual’s gender expression does not automatically imply one’s gender identity.

Gender identity: One’s deeply held core sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old and reinforced in adolescence.

Gender neutral: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (like being gender queer, for example).

Gender nonconforming: A term (considered by some to be outdated) used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. More current terms include “gender expansive,” “differently gendered,” “gender creative,” “gender variant,” “gender queer,” “gender fluid,” “gender neutral,” “bigender,” “androgynous,” or “gender diverse.”

Gender spectrum: The concept that gender exists beyond a simple “male/female” binary model, but instead exists on an infinite continuum that transcends the two. Some people fall towards

more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

Gender variant: A term, often used by the medical community, to describe children and youth who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. (See “gender nonconforming.”) People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as “gender expansive” and “gender creative.”

Homophobia: An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, “biphobia” is an aversion to bisexuality and people who are bisexual, and “transphobia” is an aversion to people who are transgender. “Homophobic,” “biphobic,” and “transphobic” are the related adjectives. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as “anti-LGBTQ bias.”

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

Intersex/differences of sexual development (DSD): Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. In the past, medical professionals commonly assigned a male or female gender to the individual and proceeded to perform gender-affirming surgeries beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child was able to give informed consent. Formerly the medical terms “hermaphrodite” and “pseudo-hermaphrodite” were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

LGBTQ: An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is sometimes stated as “GLBT” (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as “LGBTQA” to include people who are asexual or allies, “LGBTQ,” with “Q” representing queer or questioning, or “LGBTI,” with the “I” representing intersex.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ is a choice.

Misgender: To refer to someone, especially a transgender person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

Out: Describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term “disclose” (defined above).

Pansexual: A person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all gender identities and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Preferred Gender Pronouns: A preferred gender pronoun, or PGP, is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, which can create an issue for transgender and gender-nonconforming people, who may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. The most commonly used singular gender-neutral pronouns are “ze” (sometimes spelled “zie”) and “hir.” Some also use “they” and “their” as gender-neutral singular pronouns.

Queer: A term used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, “queer” is still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQ community. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. “My cousin identifies as genderqueer.”)

Questioning: A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

Same-Gender loving: A term sometimes used by members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation (gay/bisexual) without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

Sexual orientation: Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of a different gender than their own. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same gender; people who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of different genders, though not always at the same time, and people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Other terms include pansexual and polysexual. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation. One’s

sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one's sexual orientation; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Stealth: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase “maintaining privacy” is often used instead.

Transgender: Sometime shortened to “trans.” A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Other terms commonly used are “female to male” (FTM), “male to female” (MTF), and “genderqueer.” Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people with different histories and experiences are often included within the greater transgender community—such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.

Transition: A term sometimes used to describe the process—social, legal, or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormone; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control.

Transsexual: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who are transgender who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called sex reassignment surgery (SRS) (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

Appendix B

Sample Letter to an Alaskan Senator to Request Sponsorship

Date
Senator
State Capitol Room
Juneau, AK

Dear Senator,

My name is Jasmine Nickell. I have been an Alaskan resident for nearly 36 years and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) focused in the field of education, specifically secondary school counseling. I am currently working on my final project, which is focused on advocating for Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, through the route of a legislative initiative or bill idea. The organization called *Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* (PFLAG, 2017) clarify the letters and single terminology within the abbreviated term, LGBTQIA+, and this acronym represents the vast group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and/or asexual.

After interning at a local public high school in Fairbanks, Alaska for one school year, I quickly realized there was a lack of support and resources for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The reality is that students with diversity of sexual identity, sexual orientation and/or gender expression have an even harder time than the general teenage population. Research highlights a range of mental health, substance-abuse issues and other school-related problems experienced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that they are the most stigmatized minority in most school systems. Even with this knowledge, Alaska does not have any state-based law that protects its residents that identify as LGBTQIA+.

I am aiming to work as a school counselor in Alaska's secondary, public school system. As both a parent of school-aged children and an upcoming professional in the local education field, I am very concerned about the school personnel and their lack of training concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+, particularly school counselors. Adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school counselors and/or friends. This action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013). Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, should be contributing to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). However, Alaskan school counselors are not required to pursue any type of professional training that is available concerning their students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Here is a brief list of important research-based information and statistics supporting my concern:

- ❖ The Human Rights Campaign released their 2016 State Equality Index Report, citing Alaska as having done the least, compared to other states, to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+.
- ❖ A nationwide survey revealed: At least 50% of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ do not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation-
 - *74.1% responded that they had been harassed verbally
 - * 36.2% said they were harassed physically
 - * 50% responded that they had experienced cyberbullying (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009).
- ❖ They reported that a certain percentage of school staff were taking part in the verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014)
- ❖ More than half of students surveyed who identified as LGBTQIA+ expressed that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur
- ❖ They are more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression and to utilize alcohol and/or other drugs as a coping mechanism
- ❖ Some students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported decreased support from their parents and/or guardians (Espelage et al., 2008).
- ❖ They reported a diminished desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- ❖ These students have a higher risk for mental health disorders and suicidal behavior, when compared to heterosexual individuals
- ❖ Many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are not getting equal access to health care, including mental health care (King et al., 2008).

Alaska's school counselors have not been mandated or required to pursue appropriate professional training to support, protect and advocate for their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Yet, school counselors hold one of the most powerful positions to support and encourage their students, revealing an obvious need for a legislative mandate or plan that would guide counselors towards specific, helpful, professional training. There are several options for appropriate training, such as professional development workshops offered through the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Since 1999, GLSEN has been a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating for affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research

concerning educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that the current educational environments are often unsafe for this population (GLSEN, 2017).

Alaskan citizens may need to advocate at a stronger level, teaming with local representatives and senators to promote comprehensive, clear legislative mandates that successfully assist Alaska's struggling populations, including students who identify as LGBTQIA+. By supporting and sponsoring a legislative mandate that requires Alaska's school counselors, 7-12th grade, to receive professional training that will help them advocate for and protect Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, positive change can be made in the lives of so many of our youth.

Thank you for your time in considering this request. Thank you for your work.

Respectfully,

Jasmine Nickell

UAF Graduate Student/ Owner of Violet Ray Massage Studio

jlnickell@alaska.edu/ Tel (907)-799-4074/ 59 College Rd., Fairbanks, AK 99701

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Appendix C

Sample Letter to Alaskan School District Superintendents

Date

School District

Address

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Jasmine Nickell. I have been an Alaskan resident for nearly 36 years and I am currently pursuing a Master degree from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) focused in the field of education, specifically secondary school counseling. I am currently working on my final project, which is focused on advocating for Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, through the route of a legislative initiative or bill proposal. The organization called PFLAG National, formerly known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG, 2017) clarify the letters and single terminology within the abbreviated term, LGBTQIA+, and this acronym represents the vast group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and/or asexual.

After interning at a local public high school in Fairbanks, Alaska, I quickly realized there was a lack of support and resources for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The reality is that students with diversity of sexual identity, sexual orientation and/or gender expression have an even harder time than the general teenage population. Research highlights a range of mental health, substance-abuse issues and other school-related problems experienced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that they are the most stigmatized minority in most school systems. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported that a certain percentage of school staff were taking part in the verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Many students who identify as LGBTQIA+ view their school in a negative way, based upon a lack of safety. These students reported that rather than confront victimization, they preferred to skip their classes, further damaging their academic performance and grades (McCabe et al., 2013). Even with this knowledge, Alaska does not have any state-based law that protects residents that identify as LGBTQIA+. Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, should be contributing to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). Alaska's school counselors have not been mandated to pursue appropriate professional training, yet, they are in a powerful position to support and advocate for students. There is an obvious need for a plan that would guide counselors towards specific training that would give them skills and information to properly perform these essential duties.

I am aiming to work as a school counselor in Alaska's secondary, public school system. As both a parent of school-aged children and an upcoming professional in the local education field, I am very concerned about the school personnel and their lack of training concerning their students who identify as LGBTQIA+, particularly school counselors. Adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school counselors and/or friends. This action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013). Although there is overwhelming agreement from major health, medical and mental health professionals that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are healthy and normal, human expressions, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to struggle on many levels (APA, 2016). In secondary schools, when compared to their gender-conforming and heterosexual peers, harassed students who identified as LGBTQIA+ had a lower grade point average and communicated decreased post-secondary education plans (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Here is a brief list of important research-based information and statistics supporting my concern:

- ❖ The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released their *2016 State Equality Index Report*, citing Alaska as having done the least, compared to other states, to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+.
- ❖ A nationwide survey revealed: At least 50% of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ do not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation-
 - *74.1% responded that they had been harassed verbally
 - * 36.2% said they were harassed physically
 - * 50% responded that they had experienced cyberbullying
 (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009).
- ❖ More than half of students surveyed who identified as LGBTQIA+ expressed that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur
- ❖ They are more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression and to utilize alcohol and/or drugs as a coping mechanism
- ❖ Some students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported decreased support from their parents and/or guardians (Espelage et al., 2008).
- ❖ They reported a diminished desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- ❖ These students have a higher risk for substance abuse, mental health disorders and suicidal behavior, when compared to heterosexual individuals

- ❖ Many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are not getting equal access to health care, including mental health care (King et al., 2008).

Alaska's school counselors have not been mandated to pursue much needed professional training that could greatly help students who identify as LGBTQIA+. There are several options for appropriate training, such as professional development workshops offered through the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Since 1999, GLSEN has been a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating for affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research concerning educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that the current educational environments are often unsafe for this population (GLSEN, 2017).

Schools should be one of the safest places a student can spend their time and they must be supported and protected in order to learn. Alaskan citizens may need to advocate at a stronger level, teaming with local representatives and senators to promote comprehensive, clear legislative mandates that successfully assist Alaska's struggling populations, including students who identify as LGBTQIA+. By supporting a legislative mandate that requires Alaska's school counselors, 7-12th grade, to receive professional training that will help them advocate for and protect Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, positive change can be made in the lives of so many of our youth. I encourage written letters of support, emails or phone calls, directed toward local, Alaskan representatives and senators concerning this matter.

Thank you for your time in considering this request. Thank you for your work.

Respectfully,

Jasmine Nickell

UAF Graduate Student/ Owner of Violet Ray Massage Studio

jlnickell@alaska.edu/ Tel (907)-799-4074/ 59 College Rd., Fairbanks, AK 99701

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Appendix D

Sample Letter to Alaskan Secondary School Counselors and Alaska's ASCA

Date

ASCA/Alaskan School Counselor

Address

Dear Alaskan ASCA/School Counselor,

My name is Jasmine Nickell. I have been an Alaskan resident for nearly 36 years and I am currently pursuing a Master degree from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) focused in the field of education, specifically secondary school counseling. I am currently working on my final project which is focused on advocating for Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, through the route of a legislative initiative. The organization called PFLAG National, formerly known as *Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* (PFLAG, 2017), clarify the letters and single terminology within the abbreviated term, LGBTQIA+, and this acronym represents the vast group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and/or asexual.

Many students who identify as LGBTQIA+ view their school in a negative way, based upon a lack of safety. These students reported that rather than confront victimization, they preferred to skip their classes, further damaging their academic performance and grades (McCabe et al., 2013). Individuals working within a school know that youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are challenged on many levels, yet research revealed that school personnel are not fully supportive and often contribute to the negativity (Kosciw et al., 2014).

After interning at a local public high school in Fairbanks, Alaska, I quickly realized there was a lack of support and resources for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The reality is that students with diversity of sexual identity, sexual orientation and/or gender expression have an even harder time than the general teenage population. Research highlights a range of mental health, substance-abuse issues and other school-related problems experienced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that they are the most stigmatized minority in most school systems. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported that a certain percentage of school staff were taking part in the verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014). Even with this knowledge, Alaska does not have any state-based law that protects its residents that identify as LGBTQIA+.

I am aiming to work as a school counselor in Alaska's secondary, public school system. As both a parent of school-aged children and an upcoming professional in the local education field, I am very concerned about the school personnel and their lack of training concerning their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents,

school counselors and/or friends. This action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Although there is overwhelming agreement from major health, medical and mental health professionals that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are healthy and normal, human expressions, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to struggle on many levels (APA, 2016). In secondary schools, when compared to their gender-conforming and heterosexual peers, harassed students who identified as LGBTQIA+ had a lower grade point average and communicated decreased post-secondary education plans (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Here is a brief list of important research-based information and statistics supporting my concern:

- ❖ The Human Rights Campaign released their 2016 State Equality Index Report, citing Alaska as having done the least, compared to other states, to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+.
- ❖ A nationwide survey revealed: At least 50% of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ do not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation
 - *74.1% responded that they had been harassed verbally
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 - * 50% responded that they had experienced cyberbullying
 - (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009).
- ❖ More than half of students surveyed who identified as LGBTQIA+ expressed that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur

They are more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression and to utilize alcohol and/or marijuana as a coping mechanism (Case et al., 2009).
- ❖ Some students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported decreased support from their parents and/or guardians (Espelage et al., 2008).
- ❖ They reported a diminished desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- ❖ These students have a higher risk for substance abuse, mental health disorders and suicidal behavior, when compared to heterosexual individuals.

- ❖ Many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are not getting equal access to health care, including mental health care (King et al., 2008).

Alaska's school counselors have not been mandated to pursue appropriate professional training and because they are in a powerful position to support and advocate for their students, there is an obvious need for a plan that would guide counselors towards specific training. Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, should be contributing to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). There are several options for appropriate training, such as professional development workshops offered through the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Since 1999, GLSEN has been a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating for affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research concerning educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that the current educational environments are often unsafe for this population (GLSEN, 2017).

Schools are key to promoting increased access and knowledge of valuable resources. McCabe and Robinson (2008) pointed out that psychologists and counselors will need to become like teachers, potentially getting more specific training to deal with issues and difficulties that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ face, to make change that is positive. Research indicated that most students who identify as LGBTQIA+ may not have an option to address their unique issues and needs with school counselors who are competent in this area (Hall et al., 2013). Furthermore, Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, and Giambrone (2014) pointed out the reality that many students felt there was not enough being done to address homophobic bullying and teach students about the issues that people who identify as LGBTQIA+ encounter.

Prejudice and Personal Bias

A school counselor's attitude towards students who identify as LGBTQIA+ will potentially influence the quality of assistance and support that the counselor provides (Morrison, Parriag & Morrison, 1999). One example of a common bias is known as homonegativity and is defined as a type of prejudice that is demonstrated towards people who identify as homosexual (Morrison et al., 1999).

Research conducted by Bidell (2012) illuminated the importance of professional school counselors exploring their own beliefs and values as related to the issues that sexual minority students confront. The counseling competency scores are lower for school counselors than community counselors in the area of sexual orientation and multicultural and this data further emphasizes the importance for school counselors to explore the variables influencing their competency level.

Although professional counselors work under ethics that guide them to advocate for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, research highlighted the contrasting reality that the counselor's personal value system may not support homosexuality (Frank & Cannon, 2010). ASCA's stance specifically reminds school counselors that regardless of an individual's gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual orientation, they are to promote respect, affirmation and equal opportunity for every student. Professional development and continued education are vital for school counselors to align with the ASCA position concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017).

Politics of Counseling in a School Setting

When counseling in a school-based setting, the counselor is most likely working within a political system that is regulated by federal, state and local laws and therefore manifests unique concerns (DePaul et al., 2009). Professional counselors working for a school system are paid wages that are directly linked to U.S. federal funds and therefore work under the federal laws laid out by the government (Lambda Legal, 2017). Because of this, advocacy for social justice advocacy is viewed as a potential risk for the school counselor. Research by Bidell (2012) concluded that school counselors share the same concern of many teachers, stemming from a fear involving credibility, politics and judgment from co-workers.

Complicating Factors of Incompetency

Deeper, underlying dynamics are contributing to a negative school climate for LGBTQIA+ students, such as a general unsafe feeling that often leads to assault and/or harassment on school property. This further supports the dysfunctional cycle of discriminatory practices and policies being reinforced within the school setting (Hall et al., 2013). Current research reveals that although school counselors clearly know they should advocate and assist minority students, there are low levels of self-competency in this area. Bidell (2012) discovered that self-reported, counselor competency scores were significantly lower for school counseling students concerning issues of multicultural and sexual orientation. Furthermore, looking at students who identify as LGBTQIA+ who reported their experience of harassment to staff, only 32.7% of them felt their school staff effectively responded (Kosciw et al., 2014). Although the content of educator preparation textbooks continues to incorporate more information on LGBTQIA+ issues, the texts are limited (Hansen, 2015).

One study centered on the behavioral intentions of counseling, graduate students in the education field and their motivation towards youth advocacy for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, from a social justice standpoint (McCabe & Robinson, 2008). Results revealed that these graduate students did not see themselves as change agents within a school. This was not based on an unwillingness to deal with social injustice, but a naiveté about the issues and challenges that students who identify LGBTQIA+ face. Furthermore, these students expressed a lack of experience in serious social justice issues within a school environment. Frank and Cannon (2010)

emphasized that many counselor educators have confronted a challenge in presenting adequate and competent education concerning sexual minorities, often due to conservative values as well as minimal exposure to this population.

Research conducted by Shi and Doud (2017) revealed evidence suggesting additional reasons why school counselor feel incompetent when working with students who identify as LGBTQIA+. These reasons, which are related to the counselor's self-reported competency level, included training experience, location of the counselor and the school counselors' own sexual orientation. There was a higher competency level connected to counselors who identified as non-heterosexual, resided in the Western U.S. and those who achieved postmaster workshops and/or training (Shi & Doud, 2017).

Research conducted by Hall et al. (2013) concluded that LGBTQIA+ students require the support of their professional school counselors, because when educators and school staff are not adequately trained to be allies to students who identify as LGBTQIA+, they are not prepared to respond to the diverse, student needs.

There is an underscored need for graduate school counseling programs to be revamped to include realistic multicultural content and experiences that show understanding and appreciation of the strengths, history, needs and resources of all minority groups (Sue & Sue, 2013). Research presented by Bidell (2012) stressed the demand to further analyze and shape graduate, counseling training programs, with counselor educators exploring areas of education in multicultural issues including more information about individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Schools should be one of the safest places a student can spend their time. Alaskan citizens may need to advocate at a stronger level, teaming with local representatives and senators to promote comprehensive, clear legislative mandates that successfully assist Alaska's struggling populations, including students who identify as LGBTQIA+. By supporting a legislative mandate that requires Alaska's 7-12th grade school counselors to receive professional training that will help them advocate for and protect Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, positive change can be made in the lives of so many of our youth. I encourage written letters of support, emails or phone calls, directed toward local, Alaskan representatives and senators concerning this matter.

Thank you for your time in considering this request. Thank you for your work.

Respectfully,

Jasmine Nickell

UAF Graduate Student/ Owner of Violet Ray Massage Studio

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Appendix E

Sample Letter to Alaskan Students and Families

Date

Family

Address

Dear Family & Student of XX School District,

My name is Jasmine Nickell. I have been an Alaskan resident for nearly 36 years and I am currently pursuing a Master degree from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) focused in the field of education, specifically secondary school counseling. I am currently working on my final project, which is focused on advocating for Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, through the route of a legislative initiative. The organization formerly known as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, now called PFLAG National (2017), clarifies the letters and single terminology within the abbreviated term, LGBTQIA+, and this acronym represents the vast group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and/or asexual.

Many students who identify as LGBTQIA+ view their school in a negative way, based upon a lack of safety. These students reported that rather than confront victimization, they preferred to skip their classes, further damaging their academic performance and grades (McCabe et al., 2013).

After interning at a local public high school in Fairbanks, Alaska, I quickly realized there was a lack of support and resources for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The reality is that students with diversity of sexual identity, sexual orientation and/or gender expression have an even harder time than the general teenage population. Research highlights a range of mental health, substance-abuse issues and other school-related problems experienced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that they are the most stigmatized minority in most school systems. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported that a certain percentage of school staff were taking part in the verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014). Even with this knowledge, Alaska does not have any state-based law that protects its residents that identify as LGBTQIA+.

I am aiming to work as a school counselor in Alaska's secondary, public school system. As both a parent of school-aged children and an upcoming professional in the local education field, I am very concerned about the school personnel and their lack of training concerning students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school

counselors and/or friends. This action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Although there is overwhelming agreement from major health, medical and mental health professionals that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are healthy and normal, human expressions, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to struggle on many levels (APA, 2016). In secondary schools, when compared to their gender-conforming and heterosexual peers, harassed students who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a lower grade point average and communicated decreased post-secondary education plans (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Here is a brief list of important research-based information and statistics supporting my concern:

- ❖ The Human Rights Campaign released their 2016 State Equality Index Report, citing Alaska as having done the least, compared to other states, to protect its residents who identify as LGBTQIA+.
- ❖ A nationwide survey revealed: At least 50% of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ do not feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation
 - *74.1% responded that they had been harassed verbally
 - * 36.2% said they were harassed physically
 - * 50% responded that they had experienced cyberbullying
 (Case, Stewart & Tittsworth, 2009).
- ❖ More than half of students surveyed who identified as LGBTQIA+ expressed that they chose not to report due to a lack of faith that appropriate interventions would occur
- ❖ They are more likely to experience suicidal feelings, severe depression and to utilize alcohol and/or drugs as a coping mechanism
- ❖ Some students who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported decreased support from their parents and/or guardians (Espelage et al., 2008).
- ❖ They reported a diminished desire to begin college (Kosciw et al., 2014).
- ❖ These students have a higher risk for substance abuse, mental health disorders and suicidal behavior, when compared to heterosexual individuals
- ❖ At least 1/3 of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+

- Homelessness for this population is most commonly due to feelings of rejection from family based off the youth's gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Durso & Gates, 2012)
- ❖ Many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ are not getting equal access to health care, including mental health care (King et al., 2008).

What you need to know

Alaskan citizens may need to advocate at a stronger level, teaming with local representatives and senators to promote comprehensive, clear legislative mandates that successfully assist Alaska's struggling populations, including students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Alaskan school counselors have not been required to pursue appropriate professional training and because they are in a powerful position to support and advocate for their students, there is an obvious need for a plan that would guide these counselors towards helpful training. Certain school personnel, such as school counselors, should be contributing to eliminating the barriers that impede the development and achievement of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (ASCA, 2017). There are several options for appropriate training, such as professional development workshops offered through the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Since 1999, GLSEN has been a leading national organization focused on education while also advocating for affirming/safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQIA+. GLSEN presents updated, documented research concerning educational environments for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, revealing that the current educational environments are often unsafe for this population (GLSEN, 2017).

Parents and Family Member(s): Be proactive

Research has highlighted the challenges that many parents confront when their child comes out, publicly identifying as an individual who is LGBTQIA+. Most parents are not prepared for this information and they may even go through the stages of grief as they begin to accept their child's true identity ("Did Your," 2010). Many parents and families rely on their child's school as a strong support resource, and although adolescence is a common time for youth to come out to parents, school counselors and/or friends, this action often leads to grief, rejection and anger (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Parents and family members can access resources and support from professional organizations and online, professional informational sites to learn more about how they can support their LGBTQIA+ teen and/or family member, as well as other youth who identify as LGBTQIA+. Yet, it is vital that parents/guardians are aware that Alaska lacks state-based legal protection for

their students who identify as LGBTQIA+. Most parents need support while raising their children, particularly in a complex, multi-cultural society with ever-growing tensions.

I encourage written letters of support, emails or phone calls, directed toward local, Alaskan representatives and senators concerning this matter. Schools should be one of the safest places a student can spend their time, yet students must be supported and protected in order to learn. By supporting a legislative mandate that requires Alaskan school counselors to receive professional training that will help them protect and support Alaska's students who identify as LGBTQIA+, positive change can be made in the lives of so many of our youth.

Thank you for your time in considering this request.

Respectfully,

Jasmine Nickell

UAF Graduate Student/ Owner of Violet Ray Massage Studio

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Additional Resources for Family and Students Below

In-School Support for Students

There are peer support groups and organizations available at the majority of public middle and high schools in the U.S. One of these is called the *Gay Straight Alliance Club (GSA)*, and is a club that is led by students. The GSA club provides peer support for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as students who consider themselves allies. These clubs are common in U.S. high schools (GLSEN, 2017).

Resources for Parents, Students and Families concerning Youth who Identify as LGBTQIA+

- The Trevor Project- <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)- <https://www.glsen.org/>
- PFLAG National- <https://www.pflag.org/>
- Lambda Legal- <http://www.lambdalegal.org/>
- Human Rights Campaign (HRC)- <http://www.hrc.org/>
- Alaskans Together for Equality- <http://www.alaskanstogether.org/>

- Gay Lesbian Medical Association (*Recommended by the American Medical Association, AMA*) <http://www.glma.org/>

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